

TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST PUBLICS:
DIGITAL CONTEXTS FOR RHETORICAL ACTIVISM

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Transnational Feminist Publics: Digital Contexts for Rhetorical Activism

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Abstract

This dissertation combines scholarship on public rhetorics, transnational feminisms, and digital media in order to examine and critique the ways transnational activist projects use digital media with the goal of adding excluded voices and perspectives to public discourse. I offer three case studies of activist organizations committed to transnational feminist work. In each case study, I explore the ways women use various digital platforms and rhetorical tactics in order to expand public discourse in the service of feminist goals. By intervening in dominant discourses in order to insert women's voices and feminist perspectives, these organizations' communicative work is an important part of an overall framework of transnational feminist activism in the 21st century.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Transnational Feminisms, Digital Rhetorics, and Networked Publics	1
Introduction	1
Intersecting Theories of Networked, Rhetorical Publics	6
Guiding questions:.....	12
Methodology.....	12
<i>My Position as a Researcher</i>	13
<i>Selecting Cases for this Study</i>	14
<i>Rhetorical Analysis</i>	16
<i>Selecting and Collecting Materials</i>	17
<i>Campaigns and Social Media</i>	18
Chapter Overview	18
Chapter 2 Girl Up: American Girls as Global Activists	22
Transnational Attention to Women's Rights.....	22
Forum Analysis of Girl Up	27
<i>Background and Purpose</i>	27
<i>Audience</i>	27
<i>Speakers and Writers</i>	29
<i>Topics</i>	30
<i>Sample Selection and Methodology</i>	31
Girl Up on YouTube	33
<i>Two-Thirds World Girls</i>	36
<i>U.S. Girls</i>	41
<i>Other Videos</i>	43
Privileging 'American Girls': Connecting YouTube Videos to Girl Up's Website.....	44
(Re)Imagining Publics: Engaging 'American Girls'	56
Chapter 3 The Pixel Project: Spreading Genres in Opposition to Violence Against Women	64
Digital and Spreadable Genres	65
Spreadability as Uptake	72
Forum Analysis of The Pixel Project	76
<i>Background and Purpose</i>	76
<i>Audience</i>	78
<i>Speakers and Writers</i>	79
<i>Topics</i>	79
<i>Sample Selection and Methodology</i>	80
Analyzing the Pixel Project's Spreadable Genres	81
<i>Helpline Tweets</i>	82
<i>'30 for 30' Father's Day Campaign Interviews</i>	86
Conclusion	90

Chapter 4 | The Uprising of Women in the Arab World: Interrupting a Revolution 93

Public Discourse, Everyday Practices, and Interruption	96
Digital Media, Activism, and the Arab Spring	100
Forum Analysis of the Uprising of Women in the Arab World.....	102
<i>Background and Purpose</i>	102
<i>Audience</i>	104
<i>Speakers and Writers</i>	108
<i>Topics</i>	109
<i>Sample Selection and Methodology</i>	111
UWAW's Photo Campaign	112
Layers of Interruption	119
Highlighting Agency Through Interruption	125
New Forms of Interruption	128

Chapter 5 | Women's Agency and Digital Activist Practices 132

Representation	132
Spreadable Genres	134
Interruption	136
Agency	138
Practical Implications	140
Areas for Further Research	143
Activist Rhetoric and Reflexivity	144

Chapter 1 | Transnational Feminisms, Digital Rhetorics, and Networked Publics

Introduction

Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch, in their 2013 volume, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, note the “tectonic shifts” occurring in Rhetoric and Composition, including the emerging importance in the past decade of global and transnational perspectives on feminist rhetorical scholarship that look “beyond U.S.-centered work to examine women's rhetorical engagement and activism around the globe, asking what it means to analyze the many vectors—economic, political, religious, cultural, educational—that intersect with rhetorical activities and social change” (ch. 3). While transnational feminism, public rhetorics, and digital activism have all been important foci for scholarship in recent years, few scholars have focused specifically on the intersection of these three topics in order to examine the specific digital rhetorics with which transnational feminist activists engage participants. This dissertation combines scholarship on public rhetorics, transnational feminisms, and digital media in order to examine and critique the ways transnational activist projects use digital media with the goal of adding excluded voices and perspectives to public discourse. I focus on three case studies of digital campaigns in order to provide specific, contextualized examples of transnational activism. In connecting digitally-mediated activist rhetorics with theories of public rhetoric, this study demonstrates that transnational activist organizations must carefully consider how the digital platforms and rhetorical tactics they use align with particular ideological positions and engage specific publics. In order to best use the affordances of digital media to engage in transnational activist work, I suggest that activists make reflexivity a part of their processes.

This work also enters an ongoing conversation, both among the media and general public, and within scholarship in various fields, about the relationship between digital media and social

movements. On one side of this conversation, enthusiasts point to successful social movements or protest activities in order to show the democratic, activist potential of digital technologies. On the other, detractors lament the rise of “slacktivism,” claiming that our digital culture has removed the incentive to participate in meaningful, consequential activity to work for social or political change (Morozov). Both of these perspectives are technologically deterministic, assigning technology too much power to influence social practices (cf. Baym; Livingstone; Lievrouw, “What’s Changed about New Media?”). As Leah Lievrouw notes, “people direct and guide technological change – technologies don’t just evolve by themselves, in some inevitable direction” (*Alternative and Activist New Media* 8). Instead of these technologically-deterministic perspectives, Nancy Baym argues for a “social shaping” perspective, acknowledging the mutual influence of people and technology on one another: “in order to connect digital media to social consequences, we need to understand both features of technology and the practices that influence and emerge around technology” (48).

Baym outlines seven concepts that are important in talking about differences between communicative media: interactivity, temporal structure, social cues, storage, replicability, reach, and mobility. These concepts are sometimes referred to as “affordances” within media studies, and attention to these concepts helps scholars talk about differences in communication among different types of media – both among various types of digital media and between what are sometimes referred to as “old” and “new” media. It is important to note that the affordances of different digital devices and platforms vary, as do the rhetorical contexts (the participants, purposes, and their social, cultural, and material contexts), for which they are used to communicate.

In short, digital tools do not have effects on their own; any effects of new technology on social practice results from both the affordances of that technology and the ways that technology is taken up and used by individuals and groups in particular circumstances: “new media practices are embedded in a broader social and cultural ecology” (Itō 4). In this dissertation, I attend to the intersection of specific affordances and rhetorical practices through three case studies of activist groups. In particular, I look at activists’ use of specific digital platforms¹ (e.g. YouTube, Facebook), and rhetorical tactics (appealing to solidarity, focusing on spreadable content, and interrupting existing discourses) as they combine to affect participation, coalition-building, and activists’ goals. I examine these practices along with their specific social, political, and technological contexts, and thus I hope to contribute to the “social shaping” perspective.

Although digital tools have a complex relationship to communicative practices and social changes, an increasing number of transnational feminist projects incorporate digital tools as a part of their activist work. Drawing on Nancy Fraser’s work, I use the term “transnational” in this project to describe the ways that activists and discourses exceed the nation-state: activists see themselves as working on problems that cannot be confined to national boundaries and for which they do not envision solutions provided by nation-states (“Transnationalizing the Public Sphere” 14, 19). This does not mean the nation-state disappears or is rendered irrelevant, but that transnational public discourse crosses nation-state boundaries and does not necessarily address a specific nation-state for a solution. Discourse which asks multiple nation-states to address a problem, while still adhering to the nation-state as serving an important role, might still be

¹I use the term “platform” in order to suggest that the website or social media company offers a space in which users create and distribute content. However, as Tarleton Gillespie points out, this term is not neutral. “Platform” has likely gained traction in commercial and public discourses because it is useful for companies such as YouTube, who host content from “ordinary users,” in discussing their business with multiple audiences— ordinary users, advertisers, commercial media producers, and policymakers. Despite platform’s connotations of empowerment for individual users, content hosts such as YouTube and other social media sites are “‘platform[s]’ from which to sell, not just to speak” (354).

considered transnational in that participants have developed transnational methods of addressing and publicizing a problem, and rely on transnational pressure in order to push a particular nation-state or group of nation-states to a solution.

My rhetorical approach to studying these activist practices adds an important dimension to existing work in transnational feminism and digital media. In their edited collection on transnational feminist praxis, Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar note the importance of critical reflection on transnational praxis and attention to contextualized examples of transnational activities. Swarr and Nagar draw attention to the need within transnational feminist scholarship for further discussions of “the specific ways in which particular transnational collaborations and solidarities can be articulated, enacted, mediated, translated, and represented in and across the borders of the northern academy” (Introduction). The authors argue for scholarship that addresses the effects of specific types of collaborations, practices, and institutional influences on transnational work. Furthermore, Swarr and Nagar address the importance of attending to activist communities for feminist goals more generally, positing that “grounding feminisms in activist communities everywhere is a means to interrogate all forms of implicit and explicit relations of power (e.g., racist/classist/casteist), and to contest those power relations through ongoing processes of self-critique and collective reflection” (Introduction). For this reason, I ground my discussion of activists’ rhetorical work in specific communities, attending to the context of the organization, its rhetoric, and its goals, in order to understand how digital publics’ activities and academic scholarship can inform one another.

Current scholarship offering contextualized studies of specific transnational activist projects include edited volumes that focus on the relationship between local struggles and global politics, or between theory and practice (for examples, see Naples and Desai; Swarr and Nagar).

Collections such as Naples and Desai's *Women's Activism and Globalization* offer important examples of studies that apply a transnational feminist perspective to specific activist practices but do not emphasize digital or rhetorical work. Radha Hegde's edited collection, *Circuits of Visibility*, presents a variety of essays attending to the importance of digital circulation of media to transnational feminisms, but most of these studies approach the media and discourse through a cultural studies lens. Much of the scholarship focusing on the transnational circulation of media does so by focusing more on content produced by corporations, governments, or mass media than on the efforts of individuals or everyday practices. Works by Mary Queen, Radhika Gajjala, and Naida Zukic offer notable exceptions that take rhetorical perspectives on transnational feminist activists' use of digital tools for representation, dialogue, and community-building. Several rhetorical scholars argue for attention to the ways that transnational rhetorics and their effects circulate, with meanings and effects that shift in different contexts. For example, in her discussion of the rhetoric of the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan, Mary Queen argues that "women's self-representations are transformed through their circulation within global fields of rhetorical action in ways that often 'fix' these women within neoliberal frameworks of 'democracy' and 'women's rights,' thus erasing the multiple ways in which women across the globe use Internet technology to create and claim identities, agency, and political activism outside of the circulation of one-third world rhetorics of power"(471). Similarly, in her discussion of international rhetoric about women, Rebecca Dingo argues that "rhetorical meaning is not always stable. Rhetorics can shift and, thus, have drastically different material effects" (6). International goals, such as the women's empowerment initiatives coming out of the UN, become reframed as they move across geopolitical boundaries and enter different political, social, and rhetorical contexts: "[W]hile the public rhetoric of gender mainstreaming is

supposedly constant, *meaning* and rhetorical purpose change as it moves from policy to policy, from supranation to nation” (Dingo 2–3, 6). Both Queen and Dingo argue for the importance of attending to rhetorics’ shifting meanings as they circulate. In the publics that I discuss in the following chapters, some rhetorical practices engage the affordances of digital media that increase the ease of circulation. In each case study, different tactics are used by movements and their participants to transform rhetorics that have travelled from other contexts, as well as to prepare rhetoric meant for circulation in a way that might tie it back to the activists’ initial context.

My work will build on these contributions by examining how transnational feminist activists use digital tools to shape public discourse. I contend that digital, public rhetoric is emerging as an important component of transnational feminists’ activist work. Situated at the intersection of theories of public rhetoric, critical media studies, and transnational feminisms, my analysis is grounded in a unique combination of theoretical perspectives; I combine complementary insights from each of these disciplines in order to form a uniquely-grounded analysis of digital activist rhetorics.

Intersecting Theories of Networked, Rhetorical Publics

Activist practices are closely intertwined with the formation and activity of rhetorical publics. Activist campaigns begin as individuals’ identification and analysis of a particular problem and/or solution brings them together with others who share their experiences, opinions, or goals. In their discussion of transnational feminist praxis, Swarr and Nagar note that “all activism is collectively constituted. It is the community of struggle that turns an activist into a hero; the labor of the activist cannot be abstracted from the community” (Introduction). Many

activists turn to digital communication, especially social media, to form and maintain these communities. Not only do social media offer a plethora of opportunities for rhetorical interaction and community-building, many social media platforms are both ‘everyday’ and ‘public,’ because “the internet puts everyday communication on public display” (Lomborg 8). Through public rhetoric, activists form and sustain communities dedicated to this struggle, and often this work is embedded in the “everyday.” In his discussion of publics and counterpublics, Michael Warner asserts that “when people address publics, they engage in struggles – at varying levels of salience to consciousness, from calculated tactics to mute cognitive noise – over the conditions that bring them together as a public” (12). This is what activist publics do: engage in rhetoric about the conditions that bring them together as a public.

As Brouwer and Asen note, scholars of “public” and public rhetorics have used a variety of metaphors to conceptualize groups and activity described as “public” (1–3). Following theorists such as Nancy Fraser and Gerard Hauser, I conceptualize public rhetoric as interactions among multiple publics and counterpublics, whose overlapping boundaries and varying levels of influence complicate the ways a discursive arena and its dialogue are conceptualized and analyzed. Nancy Fraser’s influential work is among the first to critique Jürgen Habermas’ theorization of the bourgeois, masculinist public sphere as “*the* public sphere” (“Rethinking the Public Sphere” 62). Fraser draws attention to the formation of “subaltern counterpublics,” which she defines as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (“Rethinking the Public Sphere” 67). Gerard Hauser extends and builds upon the work of Fraser and other public sphere theorists, conceptualizing the reticulate Public Sphere as composed of multiple, overlapping publics.

Hauser also defines publics as essentially rhetorical in character. Specifically, Hauser defines publics as “the interdependent members of society who hold different opinions about a mutual problem and who seek to influence its resolution through discourse” (32). According to Hauser, “collective participation in rhetorical processes constitutes individuals as a public” (34). Further, publics are vernacular in that they emerge out of the “everyday dialogue of symbolic interactions by which [members] share and contest attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions” (Hauser 36).

Here, it is important to note that Hauser distinguishes between the capitalized “Public Sphere” as “the undifferentiated public domain in which conversation, in general, occurs” and the multiple, lowercase “public spheres” existing within it (39–40). Within the structure of Hauser’s overall reticulate Public Sphere, a lowercase “public sphere” is a particular section of the larger public discourse occurring within civil society. Hauser also refers to these specific, lowercase public spheres as “discursive arenas,” and his shifting language may suggest a limitation of his model (40). Daniel Brouwer and Robert Asen note that despite its wide influence, many scholars have struggled with the limits of “sphere” as a metaphor for public. The idea of the “public sphere” has led to important scholarship identifying the social functions of public participation, as well as distinguishing among different types of participation (e.g., public and private, or public and counterpublic) (Brouwer and Asen 3–4). However, the sphere metaphor can also limit the ways we think about boundaries and engagement: by suggesting a clear boundary between public and private, by suggesting a cohesive connection or “essential core” among members, and by limiting our understanding of “public engagement as a process that develops over time” (Brouwer and Asen 4–5). I have chosen to use the language of networked publics, without the sphere metaphor, in order to better represent publics’ multiplicity and the messiness of trying to characterize their boundaries.

In addition to Hauser's characterization of multiple, overlapping publics as reticulate, Brouwer and Asen note that a network metaphor for publics "may better explain the complexity of people's lives and the efforts of marginalized individuals and groups to advocate for their needs and interests" (7). Likewise, many media studies scholars characterize digitally-mediated public discourse as "networked." For example, danah boyd theorizes technologically-mediated publics as networked, specifying the relationship of technological tools and processes to the formation and interactions of publics through technology, such as publics that form through social networking sites:

Networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice. Networked publics serve many of the same functions as other types of publics – they allow people to gather for social, cultural, and civic purposes and they help people connect with a world beyond their close friends and family. While networked publics share much in common with other types of publics, the ways in which technology structures them introduces distinct affordances that shape how people engage with these environments. The properties of bits – as distinct from atoms – introduce new possibilities for interaction. As a result, new dynamics emerge that shape participation. (39)

Networking as a metaphor is useful for describing the formation of and relationships among rhetorical publics and, perhaps, works especially well in our understanding of the formation and activity of publics in which digital media facilitate publics' activity. The concepts of networks and networking have also gained traction in studies of transnational feminist work.

Rebecca Dingo notes that within transnational feminist scholarship, networking has emerged as “a useful metaphor because it draws attention to the links between women’s diverse experiences, aspirations, and identities” (11). Thus, networking serves as a common metaphor across public rhetoric, transnational feminism, and digital media studies, as an effective way to characterize the relationships between people interacting transnationally in online, public spaces in order to connect diverse groups of people in conversation about women and women’s rights.

In the case of transnational women’s activism, a public emerges when individuals participate in conversations about a collectively-recognized problem. The public becomes transnational when concern for the problem exceeds the nation-state; attention and discourse might cross national boundaries, but the solution to the problem might also lie outside the boundaries of the state. This discourse contributes to activity that shapes the larger dialogue surrounding gender and rights: locally, regionally, and transnationally.

Participants’ membership in multiple publics is a key feature of this discourse. Hauser explains that

Members of pluralistic societies belong to several, perhaps many, overlapping discursive arenas in which they experience the polyphony of concurrent conversations as vernacular languages that rub against one another, instigating dialogues, as Bakhtin would have it, on the questions raised by their intersections and leading us to consider possibilities that might encompass their political, social, cultural, and linguistic differences. (67)

Additionally, Hauser notes that “Vernacular discourses [...] are protean. Their coconstitution of relata and relationship brings these multiple spheres into existence and gives them definition as discursive domains” (67). In this way, Hauser contends that everyday conversations not only form public dialogue on important issues, but they *create* and *define* publics themselves—both

the identities of individuals participating in the conversation (relata) and their relationship to one another (66). This idea is especially important in the context of digital activist work. As I noted earlier, many activist campaigns ask participants to engage in ways that complement their everyday activities, leading some critics to perceive sharing or discussing issues online as insufficiently radical, impactful, or *active*. For example, Evgeny Morozov coined the term “slacktivism,” to refer to “feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact.” However, if this discourse can lead to the formation of publics (which presumably vary in size, duration, and effect), then it does have an impact, making everyday activist dialogue an important site of study.

In the following project, I examine three different transnational activist organizations, each representing a unique intervention into public discourse: Girl Up, The Pixel Project, and The Uprising of Women in the Arab World. These three organizations are important examples of transnational feminist discourses because of their scope, methods of organizing, and messages to their audience; each organization also varies along these lines. Because each organization has unique features, the different cases are treated separately in order to highlight the relationship between the organization’s rhetorical context and the specific strategies through which it works toward its goals. Different publics and different purposes call for different rhetorical emphases; through my examination of the context of each organization, I was able to draw out specific tactics that are particularly important for that case. In focusing on one tactic for each case, I was able to explore in detail the relationship between the rhetorical tactic and the specific goals and emphases of that case, and to uncover multiple ways that a tactic can work within an organization’s rhetorical framework. By analyzing the tactics and cases separately, then, my analysis produces a more complex picture of each tactic. My analysis shows that these

organizations' rhetorical tactics can be both limiting and enabling, and demonstrates the need for activist organizers and participants to engage in critical examination of the reflexive relationship between rhetorical practices and activist goals. Together, these case studies contribute to a perspective on the ways transnational activist projects are being carried out and on the use of digital communicative tools to intervene in public discourses. I examine both the communicative spaces and types of discourse that make up these movements, as well as how the discourse and dialogue of each movement works to intervene in a specific type of public discourse.

Guiding questions:

My analysis of the case studies in this project includes an examination of the ways that activist organizations address marginalized publics and assert the importance of marginalized topics or perspectives. I explore these case studies, individually and in combination, in order to address the following questions:

How are transnational women activists using digital media to insert marginalized voices into public discourse and everyday conversations?

- a. What are the digital platforms and rhetorical tactics that transnational feminist activists use to engage public participants?
- b. How do transnational activists use these platforms and tactics to intervene in hegemonic public discourses and everyday conversations?
- c. How do these activists use digital communication to involve marginalized individuals, groups, or perspectives in transnational activist discourse?
- d. Which excluded voices and perspectives do these projects add to public discourse? Which voices and perspectives remain excluded?

Methodology

My project consists of three rhetorical case studies of transnational activist projects that use digital media in order to add marginalized voices or perspectives to public discourse. The projects vary in their participants, transnational context, goals, and the public discourses in which they intervene. By examining three diverse projects, I hope to address the importance of both the similarities and differences among the three case studies. Looking at these three projects will help me gather a range of ways that digital media are used for activism and transnational public discourse, while weighing the effects of particular communication features in specific contexts.

My Position as a Researcher

I am a white, middle-class, straight woman educated in the United States; this position certainly affects the material covered in this project, which I discuss further in the following paragraphs. I foreground this position because of my training as a feminist researcher; this training also leads me to identify my own biases, to the extent that I can, and to attempt to critically examine these biases.

Additionally, my training as a feminist researcher affects my characterization of the organizations that I study. From my own perspective, the organizations in this study are feminist, and the lens I use to analyze them is informed by feminist theory. Following bell hooks' definition, I characterize these organizations' work as "feminist" because of their commitment to ending sexist oppression (18). However, I do not want to impose this term on the groups and their participants. The terms "feminism" and "feminist" have inspired controversy in transnational settings, and can be met with pushback by activists who associate feminism with hegemonic white, Western, straight, ableist, middle-class feminists who impose their feminisms on others rather than creating a dialogue and working to understand and support diverse cultures and gendered practices. The terms "feminism" and "feminist" do appear on all three of the

official websites, but only the Uprising of Women in the Arab World uses the word “feminist” in their self-description. Where possible, I try to use feminist as an adjective which characterizes the activity of these groups, rather than a label for the people involved, in order to respect the right of individuals involved to personally identify or not identify with the term.

Selecting Cases for this Study

In looking for organizations to consider for this project, I used a combination of internet searches, social networking connections, and even organizations mentioned in academic literature. I used the following criteria to select the three cases in this study.

1. Focus and goals: Because of my interest in examining the use of tools for feminist activism, I eliminated organizations that did not focus specifically on issues related to women. I also prioritized organizations for whom discourse is a key component of their activist goals.
2. Scope: Since my research questions are transnational in focus, I eliminated organizations that did not have transnational goals or memberships. Then, I examined founders and current leadership of the campaigns. While my language ability, cultural location, and training do limit the scope of my analysis and conclusions, I attempted to compensate at least somewhat for my own geographic and cultural bias by attending to the transnational context in which the organizations were founded. I hope to be clear about what my selection criteria does and does not address. I did not want to look at transnational activist campaigns which all originated in the US, because there are significant criticisms of Western-based activism that attempts to “fix” the problems of other countries or create “solidarity” that ends up being very one-sided. Therefore, I wanted to try to look at the approaches of organizations whose national and cultural origins differ. However, the

structure of the organization and its funding sources may also play a role in the organization's approach. Even among NGOs in a particular country, those with more funding and international recognition can have very different memberships and goals from more local, grassroots-style activist organizations (c.f. Poster and Salime).

3. Structure: I also considered the structure of each organization, attempting to vary between top-down and grassroots organizations. Girl Up, which is supported by the United Nations Foundation, and uses funds raised to support UN-sponsored programs, is a very top-down campaign, in that it works with well-established, internationally-hegemonic organizations. In contrast, The Uprising of Women in the Arab World is a more grassroots-style campaign, which links its origins to regionally-specific politics and events in the Middle East and North Africa. The Pixel Project falls somewhere in between, since it began with an established women's organization in Malaysia, but one that is smaller in scope and resources than UN Foundation. Unlike UWAW, The Pixel Project expresses its goals in more global terms, and has organizational partnerships with a variety of women's organizations in different regions of the world.
4. Digital platforms: The goal of this project is to examine the ways feminist activists are using digital communication, so I looked exclusively at organizations with an online presence. There has been much public and academic discourse on the uses of social media for political and activist purposes. Social media is an important part of many people's current web experience, but not everyone has social media accounts, nor accounts on the same social media sites. Therefore, I decided to look at organizations using both social media and traditional websites.

A significant limitation affecting site selection is that I conducted my searches in English. While English is a dominant language on the World Wide Web, conducting my searches in English biases the results toward one-third-world, US- or UK-based organizations, or those intended for such an audience. This may have skewed my results away from smaller, localized, grassroots-style organizations. I did try to address this in my search for organizations when I examined the origins and founders of each organization or campaign. Due to the limits of my own language abilities (I am a native English speaker; I also have reading knowledge of Arabic), The Uprising of Women in the Arab World is the only organization selected which specifically creates text in a language other than English. The organization's main website has both an Arabic and an English version, and social networking posts are often in Arabic, though some are translated into both Arabic and English. Girl Up's website and social media content are produced exclusively in English. The Pixel Project's content is also created in English, but the website is set up with a link to translate the site's content using Google Translate. While this is more convenient than having the user perform these steps on her own, Google Translate is less accurate in some languages than others, so this option limits the audience (or their experience of the site) to some extent.

Rhetorical Analysis

My primary method of analysis for this project is rhetorical. As my guiding questions emphasize, I am interested in the ways digital media are an important part of these organizations' rhetorical work; therefore, digital media are an important element highlighted in my analysis. While digital media are not agents in the rhetorical process, their affordances can play an important role in shaping rhetoric (and its circulation).

For each case study, I use a summary of information gathered in response to James Porter's "Forum Analysis Heuristic" to address the following contextual questions:

1. What is the background, organizational context, and purpose of the forum?
2. Who is the audience of the forum's discourse?
3. Who speaks and writes in the forum?
4. What topics, language conventions, genres, and rhetorical strategies are a part of the forum's discourse? (Porter 144–145)

I chose Porter's forum analysis as a starting place because it offers a method for examining the social and discursive context of the organizations in my case study, including the different types of discourse that make up a forum and the ways these discourses circulate among forum members. Additionally, the metaphor of a "forum" works well in conceptualizing the discursive activity of digital campaigns. Porter's heuristic offers sub-questions for the topics listed above, which could be used for a detailed analysis. However, I used the four questions above to create contextual overviews that precede and situate my analysis of specific aspects of each campaign's rhetorical work.

As I examine the background and discourse conventions of each organization, I also note the ways in which each organization contributes to particular public discourses: discourses among and about girls, discourses on violence against women, and discourses about the Arab Spring and women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa. Through these analyses, I work toward answers to my guiding questions.

Selecting and Collecting Materials

Because this overall framework encompasses a great deal of material, I begin by observing the context and background of each group of activists, and then narrow the focus for

each case study. Each organization has a website (which includes a blog), a Facebook page, and a Twitter account. Because the websites seem to serve as something of an official hub for the organization, I include the website's home page and "About" sections as a part of the focus for each case study. I also look at the campaigns conducted by each organization, and look in further detail at one social media account.

Campaigns and Social Media

For each activist organization, I chose to look in more detail at a selected sample of the rhetorical material available to participants and visitors. After using the forum analysis to gather a broad perspective on the rhetorical activity taking place, I then used this knowledge to select specific material to analyze. For example, in my forum analysis of Girl Up, I note that the organization's rhetoric focuses on girls' agency. YouTube videos are one place where girls and their activities are represented. So, I analyze a selection of these videos in order to look more closely at who is represented in this forum, while also considering the videos' place among the other rhetorical materials available through Girl Up.

The process of selecting specific samples of participants' rhetorical activity is different for each chapter, then, because it is grounded in the specifics of the forum. The forum analysis provides a consistent entry point into the selected sample. In each chapter, I will explain how and why I selected specific material for in-depth analysis. The following overviews indicate the major themes and ideas covered in the remaining chapters.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2: "Girl Up: American Girls as 'Global' Activists" explores Girl Up, a UN Foundation campaign. The Girl Up campaign focuses on engaging young women in the United States in discourse about important social and political ideas, as well as reshaping their

awareness of what it means to be a girl by exposing them to information about lives of young women in the two-thirds world. The campaign encourages young women in the US to raise awareness and funds for sponsored programs that help women in the two-thirds world. In this way, the campaign works to insert new perspectives into the public discourses in which young women in the United States participate.

Girl Up's tagline, "Uniting Girls to Change the World," along with materials such as the "Girlafesto," illustrate the rhetorical focus of the campaign on bringing girls together in order to effect positive social change. The campaign promotes an ideal of solidarity among girls in the United States and girls in the two-thirds world, as well as the notion that these girls have the agency to help alleviate problems facing many two-thirds-world women (e.g., lack of access to education and healthcare, sexual violence). I argue that Girl Up ultimately privileges U.S. girls, undercutting both the possibility for transnational solidarity and the agency of U.S. girls.

Chapter 3: "The Pixel Project: Spreading Opposition to Violence Against Women" explores The Pixel Project's use of digital tools to raise awareness, support, and funds to combat violence against women. The Pixel Project describes itself as "a worldwide coalition of grassroots activists and volunteers using the power of the internet to raise awareness about and hopefully mobilise millions to get involved with ending violence against girls and women" ("The Pixel Project – An Introduction"). The organization focuses specifically on using digital tools for its work, which includes reaching out to men and boys, generating conversation, and challenging expectations ("Our Vision and Mission").

This chapter focuses on The Pixel Project's use of what I term "spreadable genres." This builds on the concept of "spreadable media," coined by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, which refers to material that can be shared and downloaded from a website, transferred

across social media sites, and otherwise disseminated to multiple audiences in varied contexts. I combine Jenkins, Ford, and Green's idea of "spreadability" with genre theory to examine the Pixel Project's use of multiple spreadable genres to reach diverse publics. The Pixel Project has created a series of campaigns that focus on creating image-, video-, music-, or text-based digital genres that can be easily shared, or "spread," in order to raise awareness and funds for their cause. As Jenkins, Ford, and Green explain, an important form of interaction in our current media landscape involves sharing material with one another, and "acts of circulation shape both the cultural and political landscape in significant ways." I argue that the Pixel Project uses different spreadable genres to reach different audiences in order to draw multiple publics together in opposition to violence against women.

Chapter 4: "The Uprising of Women in the Arab World: Interrupting a Revolution" examines the ways a 'grassroots' movement, 'The Uprising of Women in the Arab World' (UWAW), uses a variety of digital and rhetorical tools to build a transnational activist dialogue. Participants and dialogue are connected through the movement's website and its Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr pages. Each of these sites uses multimodal and multilingual rhetoric, combining text, imagery, Arabic, and English to reach multiple audiences. Women share their stories, articulating the conditions of their lives and their commitment to the movement's goals. Some women write their stories; others post pictures with signs that read "I am with The Uprising of Women in the Arab World because" Still others respond to the posted stories and pictures with messages of support. UWAW uses these tools to build an understanding of the different conditions and experiences of women in Arabic-speaking countries, in order to develop a public discourse about political, social, and cultural change.

Because *The Uprising of Women in the Arab World* focuses on inserting excluded voices into an existing conversation, I use the concept of “interruption” to frame my analysis. UWAW is situated within the larger political context of recent international attention to the Arab Spring, arguing for the importance of women and women’s rights to the political goals of the Arab uprisings. In this sense, the movement engages in what Nedra Reynolds refers to as “interruption.” Reynolds highlights the agency involved in interruption, in “intervening in discourses of the everyday and cultivating rhetorical tactics that make interruption and resistance an important part of any conversation” (898). Through the tactic of interruption, *The Uprising of Women in the Arab World* draws attention to the conditions of women in various Arab countries, while negotiating a space for women to speak. In so doing, these women “open up” the discourses of revolution and political change in order to include women’s hopes for their countries’ political and social futures. I argue that UWAW engages in multiple layers of interruption through the movement’s framework and participants’ rhetorical contributions.

Chapter 5: “Women’s Agency and Digital Activist Practices” concludes by drawing connections among the three different case studies. I address the ways my project contributes to a growing conversation about the ways transnational activist projects are being carried out, using digital platforms and rhetorical tactics to reach public audiences while negotiating complex global systems of power and privilege. Situating these transnational activist projects as examples of networked, rhetorical publics, I conclude with the implications for the study of socially-mediated discourse as a part of both public and everyday life.

Chapter 2 | Girl Up: American Girls as Global Activists

Digital media are often lauded for their ability to foster or facilitate connection among individuals because of the ways digital communication collapses spatial and temporal boundaries between people in different parts of the world. For this reason, many political and social activists have engaged digital media and social networking for projects that address transnational concerns. Although digital media do, in fact, technically facilitate communication across national boundaries—in terms of easily transmitting information between digital devices across time and space—the politics of transnational communication, and the formation and representation of communities and projects which engage the transnational, have been a subject of critique long before digital media became a mainstream type of activist engagement.

Among feminists, in particular, the politics involved in forming communities, discussing issues, and articulating goals have resulted in significant critiques of many transnational rhetorics and activist projects. In this chapter, I use transnational feminist and media studies theories to analyze the rhetorical focus of a specific transnational project, Girl Up, which uses discourses of solidarity to engage young girls in the United States in advocacy and fundraising for UN-sponsored programs in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi. Before I turn to Girl Up specifically, I begin by exploring transnational discourses about women's rights in order to contextualize my analysis, pointing to some of the key themes that transnational feminists have identified as central to transnational organizing and activism on behalf of women.

Transnational Attention to Women's Rights

Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, international discourses about the conditions and rights of women in various locations around the globe have increasingly been framed in terms of “human rights” (Desai 29–30). Scholars of rhetoric and transnational feminism have critiqued

these discourses, noting that rhetorics of “women’s rights as human rights” are often deployed in ways that are exclusionary or elide differences among women, leading many feminists to interrogate this framework and its implication of universality (cf. Naples and Desai; Grewal). While the idea that certain goals or rights are desirable across multiple contexts is not problematic in itself, many scholars take issue with decontextualized or ahistorical discourses and activism on behalf of human rights.

Chandra Mohanty, for example, argues that Western feminists’ attention to the plight of “Third World” women and notions of “global sisterhood” have often been filtered through ethnocentric lenses. Global and international feminist work has been criticized for problems such as assuming a homogeneity among two-thirds-world women and the problems that two-thirds-world women face, neglecting to understand the ways that the one-third-world is implicated in the struggles of two-thirds-world women, and failing to listen to two-thirds-world women as agents and theorists. While feminist attention to these problems has improved over the last thirty years (cf. Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*), critical engagement with questions of difference, voice, agency, and global systems of power remain central to ethical, productive cross-border theorizing and activism.

Inderpal Grewal examines the ways specific discourses of human rights, and of women’s rights as a fundamental component of human rights, operate within a context that privileges one-third-world (and especially American) values and ideals while at the same time universalizing women as a category and homogenizing political projects aimed at helping women “globally.” International projects promoting women’s rights as a component of human rights have emerged within a discourse that privileges the experience of American women and American values. Within this discourse, American women are *assumed* to have human rights, even when

movements within the United States address problems such as domestic violence which are elsewhere portrayed as human rights issues: “In the context of the United States, the state and the discourses of American nationalism produced female subjects who saw themselves as ‘free’ in comparison to their ‘sisters’ in the developing world” (Grewal 142). Additionally, Grewal notes the hegemony of first-world feminisms within “global” feminist practices, which has recently operated to “affect women’s lives and women’s groups worldwide by creating a ‘common agenda’ that produced women as their subjects and as a target population”(143). In this context, not only have ideas about women and women’s experience been universalized, but so have ideas about what is good for women and who is able to help women. Transnationally, this has often meant that the United States decides which practices to condemn (often in conjunction with other geopolitical motives), and activists from nonwestern, “third world” locations are given human rights “education” and training by first world activists (Grewal 144–145). Through various projects attempting to both unite various women’s rights programs and to appeal to women specifically, “this ‘common’ framework . . . constructed ‘American’ feminist subjects in the United States in particular ways and enabled them to become agents in the practice of ‘rescuing’ victims of human rights violations” (Grewal 153). Even in activist projects whose ostensible aim is to help two-thirds-world women, American women’s voices and agency are often privileged.

This problematic framework of free and independent Western women contrasted with oppressed “sisters” in the developing world has been elucidated by many transnational feminist scholars and activists, and suggests that a crucial component of transnational activist projects involves an interrogation of the ways women involved are represented. When women are constructed as a monolithic population, the experiences and concerns of a select group of (privileged) women are normativized and often assumed to represent all women. This process

silences voices and experiences which do not fit within the boundaries of the established conversation, and thus leads to one group of women oppressing another: “as marginal as white, Western women appear to be in relation to the real movers and shakers in this world – white men – there are others made marginal by white, Western women themselves” (Kaplan 140). Feminists can show respect for these forms of difference among women by not presuming solidarity or shared experiences and goals among women simply because of shared gender characteristics, and by engaging in conversations in which the people implicated in a discussion are able to speak with an audience who is willing to listen.

To illustrate some of these broader trends in transnational discourse, and particularly digital activist movements, the following analysis examines the digital, transnational focus of Girl Up. Girl Up is a fundraising and advocacy campaign initiated by the United Nations Foundation in 2010. More specifically, Girl Up engages young women in the United States in advocacy and fundraising efforts to benefit adolescent girls in developing nations². Girls in the United States are encouraged to form clubs dedicated to advocacy and fundraising, using web resources and social media to help facilitate these processes.

Girl Up’s tagline, “Uniting Girls to Change the World,” illustrates a key technique of the campaign: rhetoric that focuses on bringing girls together in order to effect positive social

² “Developing nations” is the terminology used by Girl Up to describe the four nations toward which Girl Up funding is directed: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi. Through the lens of the UN and its Millennium Project, these four countries share similar sociopolitical and economic circumstances. However, this terminology, in which “developed” and “developing” nations and regions of the globe are contrasted with one another, has been criticized by scholars for adhering to a hierarchical distinction that privileges Western ideals and imposes Western models of political and social life on non-western locations and people. Because it is the language used by the campaign, I use this term occasionally when representing Girl Up’s rhetoric. However, my own preferred language, after Mohanty, is to use the “one-third world”/“two-thirds world” distinction: “These terms represent what Esteva and Prakash call social minorities and social majorities—categories based on the quality of life led by peoples and communities in both the North and the South. The advantage of *One-Third/Two-Thirds World* in relation to terms like *Western/Third World* and *North/South* is that they move away from misleading geographical and ideological binarisms” (Mohanty, “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited” 8).

change. For the campaign's audience of girls in the United States, Girl Up's strategies involve: facilitating U.S. girls' ability to connect with and relate to one another, encouraging U.S. girls' use of social media and community for engagement with social issues, and directing U.S. girls' awareness toward the important issues facing women in two-thirds-world nations. In this light, the campaign might seem like a positive influence in terms of youth engagement and girls' empowerment. However, as Angela Davis reminds us, "Feminism enables us to inhabit contradictions. With it, we can understand what it means to be critical and supportive at the same time" ("Feminism and Activism").

In the following analysis, I address the ways that scholarship in transnational feminisms, girls' studies, and media studies contributes to an understanding of the rhetorical structure and strategies of the Girl Up campaign. In both a contextual forum analysis and a closer analysis of selected Girl Up YouTube videos, I find that this campaign (or, at least, its public rhetoric) is *mostly concerned with girls in the United States*: connecting to one another, raising money, and learning about important issues for girls in the two-thirds world. Although Girl Up employs several effective strategies for encouraging young women in the United States to connect with one another and pay more attention to gender globally, I argue that the campaign's structure is problematic for three reasons. First, the campaign disproportionally features young women from the United States; the lack of representation from young women in countries outside the US precludes transnational connectivity between girls in the United States and their "peers" in the two-thirds world. Second, the campaign privileges the voices and experiences of girls in the United States while homogenizing the experiences of women from the two-thirds world. Finally, though claiming to support the potential of girls to effect change, I argue that Girl Up underestimates girls' agency in important ways.

In the following section, I begin with an overview of Girl Up's discourse based on my forum analysis in order to further contextualize Girl Up rhetorically, before illustrating my specific arguments about the campaign. This overview illustrates the richness of the rhetorical and contextual factors that shape, and are shaped by, the discourse of the campaign, while also drawing attention to the underlying structure and ideology of the campaign.

Forum Analysis of Girl Up

Background and Purpose

As I mention above, Girl Up is a campaign created by the United Nations Foundation. This particular campaign stems from the UN Foundation's focus on the United Nations Millennium Development Goal Three, which is to "promote gender equality and empower women" (Turner; United Nations Development Programme). Girl Up's strategy for working toward this goal is to engage young women in the United States in raising awareness and funds for girls in four countries in the two-thirds world. Girl Up's mission statement is as follows:

Girl Up is an innovative campaign of the United Nations Foundation. We give American girls the opportunity to become global leaders and channel their energy and compassion to raise awareness and funds for United Nations programs that help some of the world's hardest-to-reach adolescent girls. (Girl Up, "About")

Girl Up's broad web presence includes a main website, along with social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest,³ and Tout. The GirlUp.org site also features a blog, which is updated with new posts at least once a week.

Audience

³ The Pinterest account linked to via Girl Up's other accounts and its webpage is actually the UN Foundation's Pinterest account. There is no specific account for Girl Up, but the UN Foundation account does post Girl-Up-related content.

The forum's discourse is primarily directed toward girls in the United States, despite the fact that Girl Up boasts "325 clubs in more than 30 countries around the world" (Girl Up, "Learn More - Girl Up Club"). For example, the website discusses the challenges facing adolescent girls in developing countries, followed by a solution that names "American girls" (Girl Up, "Learn"). The mission statement also refers specifically to American girls. Role models for participants in the campaign, such as the group of "Teen Advisors" or "Youth Champions" who are highlighted on the website, are girls from the United States. A selection of links at the top of the website pages offers information for parents, educators, and the press. Occasionally, materials address the role of boys and men in the campaign. For example, blog posts occasionally address boys' options for participating in Girl Up (Terrones; Girl Up, "Andrew. 21. Blantyre, Malawi, Africa").

Based on the prominence of the section entitled "Learn" on the website, and the basic information given about the countries supported by Girl Up, the audience is not expected to be familiar with the specifics of the countries and issues involved in the campaign (Girl Up, "Malawi"; Girl Up, "Guatemala"; Girl Up, "Ethiopia"; Girl Up, "Liberia"). Figure 2.2 provides a screenshot with part of the page on Malawi as an example of this basic information; the pages about Ethiopia, Guatemala, and Liberia are similarly structured and included in the same section. Information about life for many women in these four countries is highlighted through its inclusion in the site's main menu, indicating that the audience is assumed to care about the plight of women and girls in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi.

learn

Challenges

There are more than 600 million adolescent girls living in developing countries today. These girls are bright, talented and full of dreams, but are often unable to reach their full potential.

Many of them struggle for the opportunity to go to school, see a doctor or be included in their communities. This has serious consequences including: low levels of enrollment in school, high levels of child marriage and way too many girls facing health risks from pregnancy and early child birth.

Solution

Girl Up believes that American girls are a part of the solution. We know that girls give, girls talk and girls get involved. This generation of girls cares about global issues and is concerned about the challenges facing other girls around the world.

FIGURE 2.1: SCREENSHOT FROM GIRL UP'S "LEARN" PAGE.

malawi

SECTIONS

EDUCATION
HEALTH
SAFETY AND VIOLENCE
LEADERSHIP
DOCUMENTATION
ETHIOPIA
GUATEMALA
LIBERIA
MALAWI

you see a girl. we see the future.



Malawi, often called the “Warm Heart of Africa,” is a beautiful and populous country in southern Africa.

On the other hand, Malawi has one of the worst records in the world in the areas of health and education, and a high level of poverty.

It has the fourth lowest GDP per capita in the world and more than 50 percent of its population falls below the poverty line.

Girl Up's Impact in Malawi

Girl Up is supporting the UN's work in Chikwawa and Mangochi, two districts in the southern region of Malawi. In our first year, Girl Up will directly impact at least 30,000 adolescent girls through the initiatives that provide:

EDUCATION

- 210 vulnerable girls received scholarships to attend school.

Quick Facts: Malawi

Located in: Africa
Total Population: 15 million
Capital: Lilongwe
Official language: Chichewa

- Less than 25% of girls finish elementary school in Malawi.
- Only half of girls between the ages of 15-24 in Malawi know how to read and write.
- In Malawi, nearly half of all girls are married by 18, and one in four teen girls already has a child.
- The HIV prevalence in Malawi is the 9th highest in the world and 45% of all new HIV infections are among young people. Girls are three times more likely to be HIV-positive than boys.

Learn more about Malawi!

- Read about our visits to Malawi on our blog.
- Look at our Flickr slideshow from Malawi.
- Read about Jen on "Real Girls, Real Stories."
- Learn more facts and statistics about Malawi.

[DONATE NOW](#)

FIGURE 2.2: GIRL UP'S PAGE ABOUT MALAWI.

Most pages on the site include a link entitled “Donate,” and many of the suggested actions on the “Take Action” page include sharing information or raising money; in this way, the organization’s rhetoric assumes that the audience is in a position to help through advocacy or financial assistance (Girl Up, “Take Action”; Girl Up, “Home Page”). Because the activities of the UN and UN-related programs are mentioned in discussing where funds go and what effect Girl Up is having, the audience is expected to see the UN as a positive force for change in the two-thirds world.

Speakers and Writers

Most of the official speaking and writing for the Girl Up Campaign is done by campaign organizers and girls in the United States. The campaign’s website content, many blog posts,

“official” videos, and other materials are written by campaign organizers such as the Communications Officer, Public Affairs Intern, and Digital Communications Associate (Girl Up, “Meet the Girl Up Team!”). Each year, a group of U.S. girls are selected to serve as Girl Up “Teen Advisors”; this group of girls has greater visibility than other campaign participants. These girls attend special campaign events, write blog posts, and are featured in Girl Up YouTube videos. Celebrity “champions” who lend their name and support to Girl Up are often featured in site materials such as videos or blog posts. Other voices occasionally featured include professionals who work with issues related to the campaign and girls in developing countries. Girls in the United States speak most, while celebrities, experts, and girls from the developing world take secondary and peripheral roles in the conversation. Most content is mediated through “official” Girl Up channels (i.e., the campaign website and social media pages), though participants can respond to blog and social media content through comments and hashtags. Girl Up’s web and social media discourse are usually authored by the adult organizers of Girl Up, though blog posts are occasionally written by Teen Advisors.

Topics

‘Education,’ ‘Health,’ ‘Safety & Violence,’ ‘Leadership,’ and ‘Documentation’⁴ are the official foci of the campaign. Topics such as educational opportunities, child marriage, forced marriage, women’s opportunities for work, living conditions, and quality of life are a part of this discourse. General information about the four countries of focus – Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi – is also a part of the site. Each country of focus is described in two or three sentences on the website, and then the page moves on to discuss Girl Up’s impact in the country. This work is typically described as “alongside the UN” or in support of the UN. The overview

⁴ ‘Documentation’ refers to efforts to make sure that countries collect data on girls and women.

mentions the region in which work is being done, and three out of the four descriptions also mention the number of girls that have been (or “will be,” in Malawi’s case) impacted by programs that Girl Up sponsors. The overview also gives a one-sentence description of the ways Girl-Up-sponsored programs in the country focus on Education, Health, Safety, and Leadership. The type of detail about the specific programs and their activities varies – some include the numbers or refer to specific events, some include just general statements, some include the names of specific programs or agencies.

Girl Up also shares stories about pressing issues and inspirational people from other countries (i.e., countries that are not a part of the campaign’s focus on Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi). The Girl Up campaign itself – as a positive force in U.S. girls’ lives, and as a helper of girls around the world – is also a prominent topic of discussion. Girl Up’s website, Facebook, and Twitter pages often feature YouTube videos on a variety of topics, from celebrities’ endorsement of the campaign to individual girls’ stories.

Sample Selection and Methodology

Because I am interested in the underlying ideology of the Girl Up campaign, I draw on material available on the main website, GirlUp.org. This site contains the most comprehensive array of information about the campaign, and is also regularly linked to from Girl Up’s various social media pages. In order to include Girl Up’s social media presence in the analysis, I also selected one of Girl Up’s social media accounts to analyze in detail.

Videos posted to Girl Up’s YouTube account include both professionally created and edited videos meant to publicize Girl Up’s mission to a wide audience, and more informal, v-log-

style⁵ videos featuring individual girls; some videos are more like a mix of the two. Videos are one important way that individual girls' voices are featured by Girl Up; I performed a content analysis of Girl Up's YouTube videos in order to determine which girls' voices are featured and in what context. One-hundred and forty-seven videos were analyzed according to two classification schemes, which I discuss in further detail below. The primary aim of the two analyses was to understand how often and in what context Girl Up features the voices of young women from Ethiopia, Guatemala, Malawi, or Liberia.

Because Girl Up's campaign focuses on girls in the United States, I have chosen to structure my analysis of Girl Up in terms of the ideological messages presented to its US audience. My own situated knowledge as a feminist within the United States aids me in critiquing the campaign's messages within this context. While this analysis is an important step in understanding the transnational relationships created through the discourse of this campaign, future work will benefit from culturally-specific examinations of the campaign's work in relation to each of these four countries, taking into account the transnational contexts (including historical and political linkages) in which Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, and Guatemala are connected to both the United States and to various activist projects. Despite the fact that my study will not address the full political and cultural context of each of these nations and their relationship with the United States, I do contextualize Girl Up rhetorically and socially. Using material derived from James Porter's forum analysis heuristic, I contextualize Girl Up in the paragraphs above by providing an overview of the speakers, writers, audiences, topics, and forms of discourse that make up the campaign (Porter 144).

⁵ A v-log, sometimes also referred to as a "vlog," (rhymes with blog) is short for "video blog." This genre of video takes many forms, but the typical v-log entry consists of a single speaker addressing his or her audience through a webcam. Like blogs, v-logs range widely in the features of their rhetorical situation.

Additionally, I speak about “individual” voices regularly throughout this chapter. My motive is not to privilege Western notions of individuality, but to highlight the insights that feminist theories of representation can bring to understanding activist rhetoric and practice. Whether Girl Up chooses to highlight individuals or groups, what is important is for Girl Up to include multiple perspectives: so that participants understand the diversity represented by the idea of “girl,” and so that two-thirds-world women are able to participate in a dialogue about their lives and what might benefit them.

In the following section, I provide an analysis of Girl Up’s YouTube videos, from which I develop my three main arguments about Girl Up’s rhetoric. First, I argue that Girl Up’s focus on transnational solidarity among girls cannot be realized because the voices of girls from two-thirds-world countries are not well-represented. Next, I explain that Girl Up’s rhetoric privileges the experiences of young women in the United States, while two-thirds-world girls’ experiences are presented as a homogenized “other.” Finally, I argue that the Girl Up campaign underestimates even U.S. girls’ agency.

Girl Up on YouTube

Through social media, Girl Up works to engage young women in political activity in ways that integrate this activity with their interests and everyday lives. As Harris, Wyn, and Younes show, most young people don’t have a lot of faith in conventional modes of political participation because they feel marginalized or excluded from these spaces, and “struggle to find ways to be heard and make change both within and outside of state politics in relation to their social and political concerns” (22). Because they do not feel welcomed in traditional or “official” political arenas, youth political participation is more likely to take the form of an “informal socially constructive activity than formal, organized types of participation” (Harris, Wyn, and

Younes 22). Thus, a club of peer participants, rather than a more “top-down” organization is a clever means for encouraging girls’ engagement with social and political issues. In addition, these forums are most likely to get girls involved in dialogue: “everyday and informal political discussions are valued by young people because they are grounded in networks where they already feel comfortable and where they are heard” (Harris, Wyn, and Younes 25). Through social media, Girl Up can connect these networks of informal participation.

One of the key ways in which Girl Up participants’ voices are shared is through YouTube videos. YouTube videos are a popular form of spreadable social media, embeddable on websites (Girl Up’s website features quite a few embedded videos from their YouTube site) and easily shared through social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, as well as blogging platforms such as Blogger and Tumblr. Girl Up’s YouTube videos of ‘teen advisors’ feature individual girls sharing information, in their own words, with viewers: about their own lives, about the situation of girls in other countries, and about their engagement with Girl Up. These videos provide a model for other girls who want to participate in Girl Up. YouTube videos offer one of the key places where girls can see what other girls (“girls like them”) are doing to get involved and how these girls see their role in the campaign. Since peers are a key influence on youth in this age range, these videos offer models for the kinds of participation in which Girl Up members might engage. Many girls who start a club, then, will see the website and social media content, including YouTube videos, as guidance for their own activities.

Girl Up’s YouTube site featured 147 videos at the time of this study (April 2012). The content analysis asked two questions of each video. First, each video was assessed for whether it contained the voices of women who are from the two-thirds-world in any way. Fifteen videos, or 10%, fit this category. In this first analysis, the categories were mutually exclusive. Either a

woman from the two-thirds-world was included and spoke, or not. The breakdown of this analysis is listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Does the video include a woman from the two-thirds world speaking in any way?	Number	Percentage
Yes	15	10%
No	132	90%

Second, the videos were categorized according to their purpose for Girl Up's audience. In this analysis, I broke the videos into more specific categories based on who is represented in the video. I developed these categories out of the video content (that is, they are inferred categories). The categories are not mutually exclusive, though I tried to place videos in as few categories as possible. Sixteen videos, or about 11%, were placed in more than one category. For example, a video that is titled "Meet Maddie from Mentor, Ohio," in which Maddie interviews a girl named Jasmine in Tanzania, is categorized as both "Two-Thirds World Girls" and "U.S. Girls," because both are given a place to speak in the video. Likewise, a video that features a U.S. girl, Sofia, interviewing Monique Coleman, a celebrity, is categorized as both "U.S. Girls" and "Celebrities" (Girl Up, "Girl Up BFF Sofia Interviews Monique Coleman"). These categories are listed on the far left column in the table below. In the far right column, I list the different kinds of work that the videos in each category are doing. I focus most specifically on the first two categories, in which I try to compare how girls in the United States and girls in developing countries are represented.

TABLE 2

Category	Number	Percentage	Video Purposes
Two-Thirds World Girls	12	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational videos about child marriage (2)

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profiles of specific girls (2) • Documenting Tanzania trip (3) • Promotions for Girl Up (2) • Footage from Girl Up Events (3)
U.S. Girls	104	69%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Teen Advisors (37) • Reflecting on issues, sharing ideas for involvement, and sharing experiences from events (67)
Celebrities	28	19%	General publicity for Girl Up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking at a Girl Up event (11) • Recorded promotions for activities (10) • Participating in interviews with Girl Up teen advisors, television appearances, and otherwise promoting Girl Up via celebrity presence (7)
Other	19	13%	Informative videos on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General information about the Girl Up campaign (8) • Videos on boys' involvement (4) • Girl Up events and other promotional videos, such as footage of billboards in New York City or groups of girls reciting words together (7)

Two-Thirds World Girls

Twelve of the videos, or 8%, feature individual girls from the two-thirds world speaking about their opinions, experiences, or goals.⁶ Within this group of videos, several categories

⁶ In order to arrive at this category, I considered both the content and contextual information about the video. For example, a video in which Bridget, a teen advisor, interviews Fifi Soumah, Miss Africa USA, who is 21 (and now lives in the US), is not included in this sample. Bridget asks Fifi what it means to be Miss Africa, and why it is important to help girls in Africa. Soumah describes her role as being an inspiration to other girls and giving back to Africa through the foundation she has created. Although Fifi might be considered a girl from the two-thirds world, since she is originally from Guinea, she is positioned in this video as a celebrity or leader. I did not consider Victoria Justice or Monique Coleman "U.S. Girls," and so I categorized Fifi Soumah similarly. I did not consider Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan a girl from the two-thirds world, either, because of her age and the fact that she is positioned as a celebrity or leader. In a similar vein, I do not include videos that feature only adult leaders from the U.S. in the "US girls" category (for example, Elizabeth Gore is not categorized with "U.S. Girls"). What I mean to do here is not to draw strict lines around what it means to be a girl, or what someone's identity is, but to compare the representations. A consistent theme that emerged from the videos as a whole is the pattern of individual girls from the United States speaking about their opinions, experiences, and goals. So, I attempted to use these categories to determine whether girls who are from the two-thirds world are given this opportunity. Another video that I did not include is a nine-second video featuring a large group of women saying "Happy International Women's Day!" together (Girl Up, "Happy 100th International Women's Day!"). The video description, "Happy International

emerged. Two videos focus on promoting the efforts of the Girl Up campaign and feature young women speaking about their experiences and goals; these young women are situated either as examples of the girls for whom the campaign advocates or as proof of the work the campaign is doing. Both videos focus on child marriage in Ethiopia. One of the videos, “Ending Early Marriage,” features a voiceover explaining the high child marriage rate in Ethiopia, and explaining generally how Girl-Up-sponsored programs in Ethiopia work: “Supported by the United Nations Foundation, the United Nations Population Fund and the Population Council have programs that encourage girls to stay in school and delay marriage” (Girl Up, “Ending Early Marriage”). The video goes on to describe one program in which families who do not marry off their daughters receive an “economic incentive” (a sheep) at the end of the program (Girl Up, “Ending Early Marriage”). The video then features a young woman, identified as “Student” at Bahir Dar University, speaking about her educational goals: “I study journalism, but I want to focus on the latest problem, you know?” (Girl Up, “Ending Early Marriage”). She identifies that there are problems for women in Ethiopia, and points out important steps toward fixing them: “Firstly, they have to get education. They need a place, a large place, to contact with others. They have to talk to each other, they have to get that chance” (Girl Up, “Ending Early Marriage”). The other video in this category, “A Lasting Impact,” features Elizabeth Gore explaining the prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia. The video then shows the “Birhane Hiwan Adolescent Girls Support Project” and features several people in the community discussing the issue. Kennebesh Sanaye, a community mentor, describes an instance in which a

Women's Day from Liberia!” shows the location of the video and the speakers in it. Since no girls speak individually in the video, I include it in the “Other” category. A similar example is a video featuring a group of US teen advisors in Time Square, reciting the words on a Girl Up billboard together. No girls speak individually, so I also place this video in the “Other” category. All three of the videos I discuss above—the interview with Fifi Soumah, the video with Queen Rania Al-Abdullah, and the “Happy International Women’s Day” video—are categorized as “yes” in the first analysis (Table 1). Part of the reason for the two analyses is to acknowledge and demonstrate that there are multiple ways to analyze these videos’ representation of individuals involved with the campaign.

child marriage was stopped because it was reported. Next in the video, an unnamed father and daughter are featured speaking about the daughter's education. "I would love for her to become a doctor," the father says. His daughter then explains, "I would like to finish my education and get a job. After finding a job, I would like to support my parents. Then I can get married" (Girl Up, "A Lasting Impact"). While many images of Ethiopian girls are featured throughout both of these videos (both still images and video footage), we only hear the voice of one "girl" in each.

Two more videos in the "Two-Thirds World Girls" category are educational videos that feature specific girls sharing their experiences. A significant difference in these videos is that the audience learns the names of the Ethiopian girls featured (in one of the videos above, a woman who serves as a community mentor is named, but the girl whose education and marriage prospects are being discussed is not). One video features a girl named Addis who tells about being forced to get married at age 11. Her husband wouldn't allow her to attend school: "I was very eager to go to school. There was a school near my house. But [my husband] wouldn't allow it" (Girl Up, "Addis"). The video features clips of Addis speaking, with English translations of her story in captions. At four points in the minute-long video, a black screen with white text inserts factual information into Addis's story:

"70% of the world's 130 million out-of-school children are girls."

"Educated mothers are more likely to send their own children to school."

"Today, Addis is no longer married. She is back in school."

"And so is her son." (Girl Up, "Addis")

Through this process of juxtaposing Addis's individual story with generalized statistics, Addis's story becomes something other than her individual story: her video becomes a statement about the effect of educating girls.

In both types of educational video, a specific place is featured (Ethiopia), as are still images, video footage, and voices of people from Ethiopia and from the United States. These videos identify a need for Girl Up's work and give an example of the ways that Girl Up funds are used in the region. The videos represent individual girls and regional problems, both of which are presumably important to the campaign, but there is little variety, especially in comparison with representations of girls in the United States.

Other videos in the "Two-Thirds World Girls" category feature interactions between U.S. girls and girls from two-thirds-world countries. These three videos feature teen advisors from the United States on a trip to Tanzania, in which the girls from the United States interact with girls in Tanzania, including interviews about the Tanzanian girls' experiences and goals. These videos represent Tanzanian participants in varying ways; in one video, several clips feature a Girl Up participant, Bridget, speaking to young women from Tanzania, but only Bridget is introduced by name. In another, Maddie interviews Jasmine, a young woman from Tanzania, about her daily life and the things she likes. These videos of Girl Up participants in Tanzania are difficult to place within the framework of Girl Up. There are several places where girls mention that this is a school trip, or refer to their school,⁷ in the Tanzania videos. Tanzania is not one of the countries of Girl Up's focus; this fact further complicates the purpose of these videos and their potential effects. On the one hand, these videos are one of very few examples of young women in the United States interacting with young women from the two-thirds world. On the other hand, including these videos without comment on why or how they relate to Girl Up might suggest that US girls' interaction with young women in Tanzania can stand in for interaction with young women in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi. This serves to homogenize two-thirds-

⁷ The Laurel School, a private all-girls school in Shaker Heights, Ohio (a Cleveland suburb).

world women and their experiences, a phenomenon I discuss in further detail later in this chapter.

Among the promotional videos in this category, two feature Girl Up workers interacting with groups of women in Liberia about the campaign, its mission, girls in the United States, and their hopes for these women in the developing world. One video features Liberian girls and Girl Up representatives reading letters from U.S. girls to Liberian girls. In another video, “Two Minutes with Girls in Liberia,” a representative of the Girl Up campaign speaks to a seated audience of young Liberian women. While the way Girl Up representative address participants is likely due to a language barrier, the rhetoric is portrayed problematically; U.S. women speak, and “third-world” women listen:

We are running a program that’s focused on adolescent girls in Liberia, but not just adolescent girls here—also, adolescent girls in the United States . . . They want to know about you; they want to know, ‘What do you want for your life?’ These girls in U.S, and girls like you—you are all girls. You are all the same. You all deserve opportunities. You all deserve to dream . . . They want to write letters to you . . . They want to know what music you like. (Girl Up, “Two Minutes with Girls in Liberia”)

This dialogue highlights the rhetoric of solidarity promoted by the campaign, along with the ways in which U.S. girls are privileged by the campaign. By focusing on what U.S. girls want from the young women in Liberia, this dialogue implies that Liberian girls’ desires, dreams, and music interests are valuable because U.S. girls are interested. That is, rather than asking Liberian girls about their lives because their desires and experiences are important on their own, these questions position Liberian girls’ desires and experiences as something worth discussing because girls in the United States want to hear it. This particular video also highlights the ways in which

Girl Up uses adults to mediate girls' voices and activities, another issue I will address later in this chapter.

Finally, three videos feature both U.S. girls and girls from the two-thirds world at Girl Up events. Two of these videos are from a Girl Up visit to the White House on International Women's Day. In one video, four U.S. girls and two girls from Cambodia are featured introducing themselves, explaining what they are doing, and telling viewers what they want to say to Michelle Obama. The strengths of this video are that each girl introduces herself by name, and speaks in her own voice about the event. Olivia, from Maryland, says, "When I meet Michelle Obama, I will tell her that educating a girl is very important. Educating a girl will teach her about how to stay healthy, and she can be able to plan her future" (Girl Up, "Girl Up Goes to the White House!"). Seyma, who identifies herself as being from Cambodia, says, "If I have a chance to talk to her in person, I will say, 'Thank you so much for inviting me to join this . . . day and I hope she can visit Cambodia one time'" (Girl Up, "Girl Up Goes to the White House!"). Another video related to the same event is more general. A group of girls stands in front of the White House, and Seyma (the same Seyma from the video just described) introduces the group. Finally, the third video in this category features a Skype call between U.S. girls at a Girl Up Leadership Summit and students at the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa. I will return to this video later in the chapter. While these last three videos do a good job of including girls from both the one-third world and two-thirds world, the connection to Girl Up's focus on Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi is lost.

U.S. Girls

In contrast to the limited representation of girls in developing nations, an overwhelming 102 videos, or 69%, focus solely on specific US girls. All but four of these videos feature teen

advisors. According to Girl Up’s website, “Teen Advisors help make Girl Up an engaging, effective, and powerful campaign by sharing their ideas and providing feedback on everything we do. After all, this campaign is for girls and by girls!” (Girl Up, “Teen Advisors”). Each teen advisor (a group is selected each year) has a video introducing herself to the Girl Up audience. In these videos, girls typically introduce themselves by name, give their age and location, list favorite hobbies, and explain why they are involved in Girl Up. Teen advisors also create videos of their experiences as a teen advisor. Based on the videos provided, teen advisors also serve as peer role models for Girl Up participants. The teen advisors share their experiences at Girl Up events, explain how they have participated in fundraising or awareness-raising (giving advice to the audience about how they can participate in similar ways), and share their thoughts about issues related to the Girl Up campaign (e.g., thoughts on child marriage,). Several videos, for example, feature teen advisors sharing their fundraising strategies. In one video, Jenna explains that she decided to donate a portion of the proceeds from teaching swimming lessons to Girl Up. In another video, Itzel explains that she has conducted a penny drive at her school for Girl Up and encourages viewers to conduct their own fundraising campaign. In another video, Katherine shares her thoughts after meeting the other Girl Up teen advisors.

Celebrities

Other videos on Girl Up’s YouTube site focus much more on engaging the campaign’s audience through people and ideas that girls in the U.S. presumably identify with. Twenty-eight videos, or 18%, feature celebrities. The three celebrities featured most often are: Nigel Barker of *America’s Next Top Model*, Monique Coleman of *High School Musical*, and Victoria Justice, who has been featured in multiple Nickelodeon productions and is beginning to release her own music. Celebrities are referred to as Girl Up “champions” and the celebrities featured seem to be

chosen for their ability to interest adolescent women in the United States. For example, *High School Musical* and Nickelodeon are entertainment directed at children and preteens. Former stars of these productions are likely to be popular with preteens and teens who watched the productions when they were younger. Thus, these celebrities reflect the intended audience for Girl Up, U.S. girls.⁸ Only one video in this category features a woman from the two-thirds world, Fifi Soumah, who is from Guinea and was Miss Africa USA in 2010.

Other Videos

The remaining nineteen videos on the site, or 13% of the videos feature information about Girl Up in general: explaining how to get involved, explaining the aim of the campaign, and documenting events.

In this sample of YouTube videos, then, U.S. girls are represented much more frequently, and in a greater variety of contexts, than girls from the two-thirds world. This makes Girl Up's rhetoric of togetherness problematic, since participation is focused on girls in the United States, with little representation from young women in Ethiopia, Malawi, Liberia, and Guatemala, much less transnational *dialogue* among women in these five nations. At best, this rhetoric *could* be somewhat accurate for a select group of Girl Up participants who are able to meet girls from other countries through Girl-Up-sponsored events, such as the trip to the White House or the Leadership summit. However, the YouTube videos in this sample show Girl Up participants interacting (in person and via online video calls) with young women from Tanzania and South Africa, rather than Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, or Malawi. Even for these young women, the

⁸ Most of these celebrities are from the U.S.; all of the celebrities have a celebrity status through U.S.-based productions. Two celebrities—Nigel Barker and Estelle—are originally from Britain. Nigel Barker is from London, but lives in New York City and is best known in the US (and most likely among girls) for his role on the U.S. show, *America's Next Top Model*, on which he served as a judge from 2004-2012. Estelle is a British singer-songwriter who has collaborated with a variety of famous U.S. artists such as Kanye West, John Legend, will.i.am, Cee Lo Green, Nas, and Rick Ross. Her most popular song (based on chart positions) is called "American Boy," and features American rapper Kanye West.

assumption of “togetherness” is problematic if it is not accompanied by a more long-term working relationship. For most of the young women involved in the campaign, the “togetherness” is imagined, and may be more imagined by those in the United States than by girls in the two-thirds world who are the focus of these fundraising and advocacy efforts. As Vera MacKie explains,

In positing an ‘imagined community’, whether this be a nation or a group of people engaged in a common political struggle, we need to ask who is doing the imagining, and whether all of those whose names are invoked share the same vision of that community (Kaplan et al. 1999). It is likely that activists may feel a sense of community across national boundaries, but is this sense of community shared by the women who are the object of their concern? (MacKie 184)

Girl Up’s rhetoric gives U.S. participants very few opportunities to interact with girls who are the “object of their concern,” and therefore little opportunity to build connections with girls in the two-thirds world.

Privileging ‘American Girls’: Connecting YouTube Videos to Girl Up’s Website

In the following section, I connect some of the patterns from Girl Up’s YouTube videos to other discourse on Girl Up’s Website in order to show how the campaign privileges U.S. girlhood and homogenizes two-thirds-world girls’ experiences. To further situate Girl Up’s transnationally-focused discourse, I turn again to feminist scholarship in order to illustrate the importance of understanding difference for projects that aim to help diverse groups of women. Transnational feminisms draw attention to the ways that global positions of power and privilege, or lack of power and privilege, are linked in both ideological and material ways. Thus, scholars and activists focused on building alliances and engaging in transnational activism need to be

aware of the ways that identities, communities, and nations are imbricated in global systems of power and the production of capital. Many feminist projects over the past several decades have theorized the ways in which intersecting forms of oppression work, contributing to an understanding that women do not all experience sexism and other forms of oppression in the same way. Patricia Hill Collins conceptualizes the interrelatedness of oppressions through concepts such as “intersectionality,” which “refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppressions cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (11). Feminism’s concern with difference and intersectionality highlights the inadequacy of using binary notions of sex or gender as principles for organizing and unifying individuals and communities. Doing so assumes common experiences and concerns among women, and ultimately serves to reinforce the privilege of certain women along axes such as race, class, sexual orientation, disability, or culture.

Transnational and postcolonial feminists point out that neglecting difference also reinforces power and privilege on a global level. Chandra Mohanty refers to the ways that discursive practices of Western feminists can “colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular ‘Third World Woman’” (*Feminism without Borders* 334). She notes that Western feminist scholarship often produces what she calls “Third World Difference,” in which the historical specificity of subjects in diverse locations within the third world are subsumed in reference to a monolithic version of oppression” (Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders* 335). Mohanty explains that “it is in the production of this ‘Third World Difference’ that Western feminisms appropriate and ‘colonize’ the fundamental complexities and conflicts which

characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries” (Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders* 335). Thus, attention to the heterogeneity and complexity of women’s lives in the two-thirds world is essential in creating a movement which does not colonize women through this production of “Third World Difference.”

For global activism and advocacy originating in the United States, it is especially important to carefully consider women’s representation and the acknowledgement of difference because of the U.S.’s powerful role in global politics. The Girl Up campaign explicitly creates a binary distinction between “American Girls” (meaning young women in the United States) and “girls living in developing countries” (Girl Up, “Learn”). In some sections of the site, the distinction is further simplified, opposing American girls to “girls around the world” and making the even more problematic binary opposition of United States/Other. For example, Girl Up’s website features a description of the “Challenges” facing girls in developing countries, along with the following “Solution”: “Girl Up believes that American girls are a part of the solution . . . This generation of girls cares about global issues and is concerned about the challenges facing other girls around the world” (Girl Up, “Learn”). On the site’s “Take Action” page, visitors are greeted with the following call to action: “We need your help! Support the movement for adolescent girls and tweet your friends to tell them to take action to help girls around the world” (Girl Up, “Take Action”). In both of these quotations, U.S girls are positioned as distinct from girls in other countries. These quotations position girls in the United States as having greater agency than “girls around the world.”

While Girl Up’s slogan, “Uniting Girls to Change the World,” does not specify which girls unite with one another, much of the other rhetoric on the site does indicate that part of the

campaign's mission is to unite girls in the United States with girls in other parts of the world. For example, the campaign's 'Girlafesto' imagines a transnational community:

I am a girl. Bright, able, outspoken, soft-spoken, serious, spirited, adventurous, curious and strong. I am me. I follow. I lead. I learn. I teach. I change my clothes, my hair, my music and my mind. I have a voice that speaks, ideas to stand on, and a world to step up to. I matter. And so does she. She may look different and talk different, but she is like me. She is a girl. And together, we will rise up. Because while we are strong, together we are stronger. And together, our voices will change our world. You see a girl. We see the future. (Girl Up, "Girlafesto")

The 'Girlafesto' compares and contrasts the positions of girls in the U.S. and girls in developing nations quite explicitly, referring first to "I" and describing the "I" in specific terms, and then aligning that "I" with a non-specific "she": "I matter, and so does she." The Girlafesto is available on the website for downloading and sharing. Part of Girl Up's "high five" asks participants to share the Girlafesto with five friends and family members. A video dedicated to the Girlafesto features U.S. women (girls and adults) reciting the words; while the women in the video are not named, many of the girls are recognizable as teen advisors, and some of the women appear in other videos as Girl Up staff. The "I" in the Girlafesto, then, seems to refer to the U.S. girls toward whom most of the campaign materials are directed; "she" could refer to a girl anywhere else in the world. This rhetoric encourages differences to be subsumed under the category of "girl," so that girls in the United States and girls in two-thirds-world nations have something in common, around which to unite: "She is like me. She is a girl. And together, we will rise up. Because while we are strong, together we are stronger. And together, our voices will change the world" (Girl Up, "Girlafesto").

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak draws attention to the importance of representation by emphasizing the ways in which the subaltern woman has no space in which to be heard in Western discourses. She points to the ways that Western, first-world discourses attempt to homogenize diverse people and cultures through the “benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscription of the Third World as an Other” (Spivak 289). Spivak explains that in many attempts to improve the conditions of subaltern women, western intellectuals actually end up speaking for these women rather than creating spaces in which subaltern women can speak for themselves. In order to achieve the connections envisioned in the ‘Girlafesto,’ the voices of young women in developing nations need to be a part of the conversation in ways that parallel the voices of young girls in the United States.

Significantly, the rhetoric of the Girl Up campaign explicitly puts forward the idea that young girls in developing nations do not have a voice, explaining to audience members that “With Girl Up, you speak for girls who do not have a voice . . . yet.” (Girl Up, “Leadership”). When the voices of young women outside the United States are featured in the discourse of the Girl Up campaign, these voices are positioned differently than those of young women in the United States. For example, Girl Up’s blog features a section called “Real Girls, Real Stories,” which features written stories of the “real girls” helped through Girl Up’s efforts (i.e., girls from Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi). All of these stories are told through someone else’s perspective: some through a specific American girl, and others simply from a third-person point of view. The stories typically focus on narratives about specific experiences in the girls’ lives, and how Girl-Up-sponsored programs are helping them. On the other hand, stories of American girls, such as the Teen Advisors, are accompanied by video, told in first-person, and include more detail about the girls’ interests and activities. While the most obvious reason for this might

be the different languages spoken by participants, there are videos on the site where girls from Ethiopia and Liberia speak in their own language (with subtitles) or in English, so there are means for accommodating language difference.

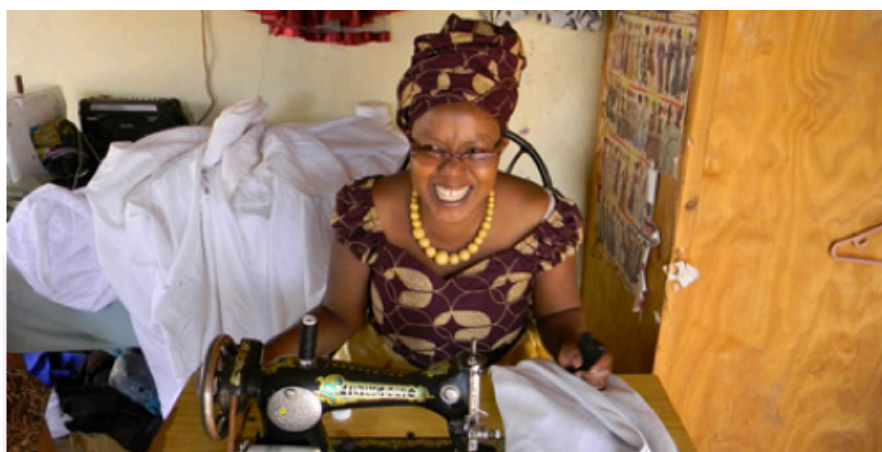
Additionally, in places where Girl Up does focus on individual girls from the developing world, these girls are often positioned as stand-ins (representatives) for a larger population. This occurs on the “Learn” section of the site, which includes pages dedicated to each country and goal that are part of Girl Up’s focus. For example, one story in the “Learn” section is told by a Girl Up teen advisor, Karina, who compares her life with that of Massa, a young woman who lives in Liberia:

For the majority of girls living in Liberia and other developing countries, work takes priority over education. For me and my peers in the United States, getting an education is our sole responsibility and priority . . . I quickly realized that the situation for Massa and other girls living in developing countries isn’t as simple as a lack of candles; it’s many complications that add on to each other. Disease, poverty, violence, sexual abuse, hunger, illiteracy, child marriage—it’s all interconnected . . . There’s a girl like Massa in every village in Liberia, and one by one, they can start to reshape the world. (Jougla)

By referring to “a girl like Massa in every village in Liberia,” Karina places Massa in a position of representing not just her own experience, but the experience of “girls in Liberia” more generally. In this particular story, Karina also speaks about her own situation as representative of girls in the United States. Karina’s situation is most likely not representative of all U.S. girls. There are likely many girls in the United States for whom education is not their sole priority. However, the most pressing problem is that Massa is unable to tell her own story. Karina tells it for her. A helpful start would be for Massa to tell her own story, and for other girls in Liberia to

add their stories, as well. While Karina’s understanding of her situation in comparison to other girls in the United States may not be accurate, it is important that she is telling her own story, and that other girls from the United States are also represented, telling their own stories. This also points to another thing Girl Up might encourage: U.S. girls reflecting on their different experiences in the United States. Through this process, Karina might be exposed to other ways that girlhood is experienced in the U.S.

Another story on the blog (Figure 2.3) is about Jen from Malawi (Girl Up, “Real Girls, Real Stories: Jen”). The story focuses heavily on information about how UN programs have helped Jen, and how her life can be interpreted as successful in light of Girl Up and UN goals, reducing her narrative to one that “sells” UN



Jen lives just outside of Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi. Primary school is free in Malawi (although few families can afford books and school supplies), but public high schools charge tuition. Jen’s family didn’t have the money to send her to high school, so she was “just at home, helping her family, but with really nowhere else to go.” **Less than 25 percent of girls finish primary school, and nearly half of all girls are married by 18.**

But in 2001, when Jen was 17, she heard about a United Nations Foundation-supported program working with out-of-school girls to teach income-generating skills. Jen joined the program and participated in it for three years, learning to sew, cut, and drape cloth. **Now, at 26, Jen is a fashion designer with three tailors working for her to help keep up with all the orders!**

Because of the skills she learned and the business she built, Jen was able to choose her own path, including deciding whom to marry and when. She is happy, healthy, and, due to her success, able to support her mother.

Jen didn’t get to finish school, but she mentors younger girls in her community to ensure they know their options. She said she appreciates the work of the UN and its partners in Malawi that allowed her to learn a money-making skill and leverage her smarts to turn that into a successful business!

FIGURE 2.3: JEN FROM MALAWI (GIRL UP, “JEN”).

programs. Jen's story also positions her as a representative for girls in the developing world.

Consider especially the odd juxtaposition in the first paragraph of a decontextualized statistic with Jen's story. Not only is it unclear who the statistic refers to (e.g., girls in Malawi, all girls in the developing world, or something else), but the statistic makes it clear that Jen's story functions as evidence to support the need for Girl Up's program. Jen's "success" also begins in 2001, well before Girl Up was founded in 2010.

The four countries that are the focus of the Girl Up campaign – Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi – are geographically dispersed and culturally distinct, with unique economic and political concerns. Despite the vast differences in their location and situation, girls from these countries are taken together to represent "the developing world" on the Girl Up site. Even more problematically, rhetoric which points to the larger situation of "girls in the developing world," often implies that a single narrative can serve to represent all young women in the developing world. This reference to "girls in the developing world" occurs regularly in descriptions of Girl Up and its goals, or in informational statistics. For example, Girl Up's informational section on "Documentation" explains that "girls in developing countries face a number of challenges that make it difficult to fulfill their aspirations" (Girl Up, "Documentation"). Another example, in the educational section on "leadership," is accompanied by information about young girls' work responsibilities in the developing world:

In many developing countries, a girl may have to marry young and take care of her older husband and her own children. She might have to stay home and take care of younger siblings and household chores. She might have to go work in someone else's house and take care of their siblings, or chores, or babies. That does not leave a girl a lot of time to have her say. (Girl Up, "Leadership")

Here, the life of a young woman in the developing world is represented in both vague and homogenizing language. In spite of the qualifying language used—“many,” “may,” and “might”—this passage treats the young women described as having lives defined similarly by care for others (siblings, husband, and/or children) and household chores. There may, indeed, be similarities in the daily occupations of young women in various developing nations. However, passages such as this one highlight Mohanty’s concern with subsuming differences of race, culture, class, language, religion, and nationality, creating a mystified version of difference through the construction of a monolithic, third-world “Other.”

In contrast to the representation of young women in developing nations, the teen advisors (members of Girl Up in the United States) are given their own space to speak, creating videos and writing their own biography from a first-person perspective. These young women emerge as individuals with specific histories, locations, concerns, and goals. We learn how and why they became interested in Girl Up (or helping girls in general), where they go to school, what they like to study, which hobbies or activities they participate in, and what they want to do with their future.

It is no wonder, then, that the young U.S. women involved with Girl Up see “voice” as a key difference between themselves and young women in Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, and Guatemala. As one young teen advisor explains, “I believe that everybody has a voice, and I intend to make mine heard while helping others find theirs” (Aditi P). Aditi’s statement aligns with Girl Up’s own rhetoric: “With Girl Up, you speak for girls who do not have a voice...yet” (Girl Up, “Leadership”). Of course, it is impractical to think that the girls who participate in Girl Up will come to the campaign with a working knowledge of feminist theory or a critical understanding of how they are positioning themselves in relation to other girls. However, the

rhetoric on Girl Up's website and in its promotional materials could model appropriate ways of understanding difference. Then, a statement like Aditi's might offer an opportunity for participants to be both positive and critical. What does it mean to help someone find their voice? Who has decided that girls in developing countries do not already have a voice, or are unable to "find" their voice? Following Spivak, we might more accurately suggest that girls in the two-thirds world do indeed have voices, but that there are important conversations in which those voices are not offered space in which to speak, or are not "heard."

Additionally, while it is important for the young women involved in these campaigns to connect with one another through shared goals, constructing all girls as similar may present a problem for moving past superficial aims. Much of the rhetoric of the website speaks of girls as connected through girlhood, showing a lack of concern for intersectionality. The campaign appears to see the value in creating an understanding of the differences in experience between girls, because they include stories and educational material for their audience. However, it would be beneficial to offer more ways for girls in other countries to share their voice and their individual experiences.

Girl Up's rhetoric also constructs normative accounts of what adolescent life should be like. For girls who participate in this campaign, life for girls in the United States is defined as "normal," and is privileged over the life experiences of girls in developing nations. For example, in one video on the site, Isabella, a Girl Up teen advisor, refers to her twin sister in Vietnam. Isabella was adopted as a baby into a family in the United States because her parents couldn't afford to keep both her and her sister. Isabella explains that she goes to school, plays sports, and has fun with her friends. Isabella's sister spends her day working to help her family. "It's not what a normal teenager would do," Isabella explains (Isabella S.). Isabella's situation is unique;

however, her comment shows how the emphasis on similarity privileges and normativizes American girlhood, which can serve to reproduce unequal power relations. The construction and positioning of young women, first within a binary opposition (U.S. girls and girls in developing nations) and then as fundamentally alike glosses over important differences that can (and should) complicate ideas about what is “good” for girls globally.

A video example offers another instance in which Girl Up normativizes U.S. girlhood. A video called “Connecting the Dots” asks viewers to imagine being twelve years old. The video animation presents sketches of a girl whose surroundings are redrawn to take viewers through her life:

From school, to soccer practice, there’s a lot to navigate, including the rest of your life. You get decent grades, find a few friends, make good decisions about boys (well, mostly). You go to college, get a job, buy some shoes. You fall in love and plan for the future. Maybe you’re still figuring it out, but you’re on your way. (Girl Up, “Connecting the Dots”)

The use of a general “you” creates the impression that this is a “normal” girlhood, because the “you” assumes that this general trajectory will apply to most viewers, or at least be seen by most viewers as normal. From this point, the video zooms out to show a timeline; the scene viewers have just witnessed, of the girl who is “on [her] way” is the dot at the end of the timeline; other dots along the way show the previous events from the video (going to college, getting a job). “Okay, let’s rewind,” the narrator says, “You’re twelve again. But this time, you’re one of the 85% of all the world’s adolescents with a lot fewer options” (Girl Up, “Connecting the Dots”). A sketch of the earth passes in front of the US girl, who is pictured in jeans and a t-shirt, obscuring

her from view. As the earth keeps moving, the girl becomes visible again, this time in a calf-length skirt. The narrative continues:

School is out of the question. You have to work. You're forced to marry at thirteen. Your husband isn't faithful, so you get HIV by 18. And without a whole lot of say in the matter, you have four kids by age 20. And after that, well, things just get worse. (Girl Up, "Connecting the Dots")

The paper on which this girl is being drawn is torn apart and the screen zooms out to a map of the world, on which dots begin to appear, growing bigger until they meet one another. "Now multiply that by the 600 million adolescent girls in developing countries, and you start to see that our world is at a turning point. But what if you could improve the odds for these girls? When you connect the dots, you start to improve the options for girls around the world" (Girl Up, "Connecting the Dots"). The video then rewinds to imagine the 12-year-old girl in a developing country who has "a safe space to live, learn, and play. A place to be a girl. Add better healthcare, and a small loan to start a business, and what do you have? The power to help her build a better future. For herself, her family, her community, and her world" (Girl Up, "Connecting the Dots"). This video presents one model of U.S. girlhood, privileging that model as normal, and better, than other experiences of girlhood. The story of life for adolescent girls in the two-thirds world homogenizes diverse experiences, especially when the story is presented alongside a world map filling up with dots to represent the 600 million adolescent girls who live in developing countries.

Another important feature of the rhetoric on Girl Up's website is in the future it imagines for the young girls that are the focus of the campaign. Young girls in America are often positioned as future global leaders. Young girls in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi are

positioned as future leaders, as well, but this leadership is less framed as global. Again, this privileges Americanness and contributes to the erasure of two-thirds-world women's experiences from narratives about our collective global future. A video by the United Nations Foundation featured on Girl Up's website features Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan explaining the campaign: "It's not fair for it to be a lottery of birth who gets to blossom and who doesn't, who gets to have a future and who doesn't. So this program is about the next generation of American girls ensuring that their peers in developing countries will become leaders in their own countries" (*Queen Rania*). This statement positions American Girls as transnational, as having the ability to travel and effect change across the world, while their "peers in developing countries" are imagined as local leaders. American girls are assumed to have the power to access and change the world, rather than just their own community, but we don't know how the American girls are actually doing this. What does emerge from this narrative is a model of activism in which privileged Americans, who presumably know what's best for others, offer to help these others achieve for themselves what Americans are already presumed to have.

(Re)Imagining Publics: Engaging 'American Girls'

It might be argued that Girl Up, with its focus on adolescent girls, is simply trying to encourage the forms of engagement that are most available and appealing to their audience of young girls. However, in addition to fitting into a problematic narrative that activism needs to be enjoyable in order for it to garner support, limiting the possibilities for engagement significantly underestimates the agency of the very young girls who, according to the campaign, are capable of uniting and changing the world.

Online friendships and communities can take a range of forms and provide different types of value to different people (cf. Baym; Chayko). Online interaction and offline interaction can

work together in building connections between people; just like offline connections, online friendships can take a variety of forms. Girl Up encourages girls to connect with one another online and off, and to build connections through involvement in the campaign, which is a positive thing. Girl Up encourages multiple forms of participation, and these various forms of participation encourage both building acquaintances and loose ties to other participants, as well as community-building around already-existing, strong-tie friendships. By encouraging such diverse practices as “joining the movement” by signing up with a name and email address, and “starting a club” within one’s existing community, Girl Up is likely to foster a variety of results in audience participation (Girl Up, “Take Action”).

A key feature of the Girl Up campaign is its focus on material that can be shared and downloaded from the website or transferred across social media sites. In a video on Girl Up’s website, Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan describes Girl Up’s focus on young women and social media: “[Girl Up] is trying to harness the skills and social networks of girls here in the United States to help their peers in developing countries. So, it’s a campaign by girls, for girls, trying to also redefine our definition of peer-to-peer networking—move it from sharing of movies and music to sharing of missions and movements” (Girl Up, “Queen Rania”).

This aspect of the campaign involves what Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green call “spreadable media,” which they describe as the increasing prevalence of interaction through sharing, or “spreading,” meaningful material, and the ways digital technologies and platforms facilitate this type of interaction. An important aspect of a networked culture in which media spread is in the type of messages that are circulated. The spreadability of content has implications for its meaning and how individuals understand it: “As material spreads, it gets remade: either literally, through various forms of sampling and remixing, or figuratively, via its

insertion into ongoing conversations and interactions” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 33). This aspect of the campaign is important because, as Jenkins, Ford, and Green note, “Acts of circulation shape both the cultural and political landscape in significant ways” (45). By encouraging girls to share “missions and movements,” Girl Up works to intervene in girls’ everyday discourses—to get the public of U.S. girls engaged in new or different discussions than those which are currently dominant within this public.

Girl Up encourages participants to share and spread material, both online and off. The website features downloadable images and content, links to social media pages, and even offers a section on “suggested wording” for participants to begin with if they plan to use Twitter to participate. On Girl Up’s online social media pages and its website, the campaign focuses on presenting neatly packaged material that is easy to understand, support, and spread. Ending child marriage, for example, is a key issue that the campaign focuses on. Girl Up regularly sends out tweets such as “How would you end child marriage? <http://www.facebook.com/girlup#girlsnotbrides>” and “Everyday 25K girls are forced to marry. Sign this petition and say I DO stand against child marriage <http://bit.ly/JX3Qlw>” (Girl Up).

Interestingly, though, these prepackaged models for rhetorical engagement could serve to limit the *quality* of U.S. girls’ engagement with the issues raised by the campaign. Anita Harris discusses the ways in which adult-defined spaces for youth to speak out may not be the best forums for youth to develop and express their views:

With the move toward enhancing youth participation, there has now emerged a preferred way of being politically engaged and expressing social critique. Participating means displaying oneself and speaking out in particular ways in particular places, places that are on view to the authorities who grant this empowerment at virtually all times.

Consequently, young people's capacity to engage with one another beyond the surveillance of adults has been far reduced, and other, more complicated discourses about politics and the social world are becoming more difficult to articulate. (138)

Harris notes that many spaces which used to be available for private activities are becoming coopted and regulated, leaving girls few places to explore and develop their ideas on their own. Rather than asking girls to consider the issues and develop their own statements supporting the campaign, the tweet examples above ask girls to pass along someone else's message. While this can help unify the message for a broad audience of potential donors, it does not ask girls to lend their agency and voice to the campaign-

In addition to the argument that adult regulation leaves youth little room to develop their own views and modes of engagement, Harris also notes that adults' influence on youth engagement may serve to reproduce the status quo:

youth leadership forums frequently model mainstream politics, with the accompanying reproduction of inequitable economic and social relations. In particular, the leaders and representatives continue to be selected from the privileged, and they then come to stand in for 'youth' in general . . . This, in turn, may interfere with their capacity to effect change and with the capacity of other young people to participate meaningfully (139).

Through sharing, learning, and connecting with one another, girls can develop a sense of themselves and begin to make sense of the larger world in which they are a part (Brown 9).

However, it is important that the ways in which we encourage girls in the U.S. to grow and develop political consciousness are not ways that negate the voices and agency of girls who are differently situated in terms of global power and privilege.

In both the context of specific communities and in the interactions among communities and nations, attention to difference is an essential component of theorizing and organizing. It is not only important to recognize differences among women as individuals who have different lived experiences and different relationships to systems of oppression and privilege, but to recognize the ways these systems operate transnationally, within the context of global flows of ideas, material resources, and power. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan emphasize the importance of recognizing *linkages* between different transnational positions of privilege and power, noting that “one’s privileges in the world system are always linked to another woman’s oppression or exploitation” (19). Recognizing and analyzing the interconnectedness of various subject positions within this global system is an essential component of any project hoping to change these positions in order to rectify structures of oppression and systems of exploitation. Girl Up offers leadership and empowerment opportunities for young women in the United States, but these opportunities often involve one-third-world women *speaking for* girls in two-thirds-world countries.

Strategic use of new media might allow girls in the United States to connect with their peers in the developing world. Meaningful dialogue and collaboration would offer substantial benefits to both parties. One video in my analysis offered a promising foundation upon which Girl Up might build in order to foster this dialogue. The video features a Skype call between a group of girls at the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls and participants in a Girl Up Leadership Summit. Each group of girls has the opportunity to ask questions of the other group, while individual girls are able to add their own voice to the conversation through their responses. The eighteen-minute video shows participants engaging with important feminist issues: whether boys have a place in feminist movements, how families influence or respond to girls’ decisions,

how communities support women and girls, and, most importantly, whether, and how, issues that girls experience in one location are experienced in another. Participants in this dialogue respond to one another's questions in intelligent, thoughtful ways. This video, in which technology is used to facilitate communication among girls in different regions of the world, might offer a model or a starting place from which Girl Up can work in building further opportunities for interaction.

Chandra Mohanty argues that attention to difference can strengthen the possibilities for organizing and coalition-building across cultural and political boundaries.

[D]ifferences are never just 'differences.' In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders. (*Feminism without Borders* 226)

The element of hope in Mohanty's critical stance is key, especially in the context of young girls' activist engagement. Working across borders is possible, but it requires tricky processes of navigating cultural norms, national politics, and the diverse experiences and viewpoints of those involved.

Girl Up identifies a "challenge" in which the organization hopes to engage participants. This challenge encourages identification with one another through their position as adolescent girls and their orientation toward their future: "Adolescent girls have tremendous potential to be strong, bright, and curious leaders, sports stars, prime ministers — you name it. But adolescent

girls in developing countries face a number of challenges that can make it difficult to fulfill their aspirations. Join Girl Up and you can help girls globally live their dreams” (Girl Up, “The Challenge”).

How individuals understand difference and its place within matrices of oppression influences how their political consciousnesses develop and the solutions they envision. Girl Up’s organizers may, in fact, realize that girls in the United States and girls in developing world are separated by more than looks and language. However, the rhetoric of the campaign often promotes a simplified view of these girls’ situations, both girls in the US and girls in the “developing world.” It is important to consider the implications of such an ideological position, both for those structuring advocacy and aid programs and for the young girls developing as advocates and activists. If we hope to make a positive impact on the situation of young women globally, part of that process should include thinking critically about how activist efforts are grounded in specific ideologies.

Issues of difference and representation have been an important component of feminist theory for decades, yet as Girl Up and many other feminist projects show, these issues are still present in activist projects. Just because time and space can be more easily crossed using digital technologies does not mean that digital activist projects actually represent transnational interests. Using digital media to encourage girls to discuss their perspectives on social, political, economic, and cultural issues is an important project. In order for these discussions to reach their full potential, however, it is important that Girl Up encourage participation from all who are affected. Nancy Fraser identifies participatory parity as a critical factor in theorizing a transnational public sphere (22). If Girl Up does not engage girls from Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi, the organization undercuts an opportunity for transnational public discourse.

In understanding this campaign, and similar projects which use social media to reach out to young people, encouraging activism and engagement, we need to be conscious of the ways our discourse is situated in our modern context. Especially in campaigns that reach out to young people, activists should consider the ideological messages, engagement strategies (and the behaviors they reinforce), technological affordances, and interrelated systems of privilege and power in which we circulate messages and take up particular actions. Although Girl Up has many positive aims and practices, and does give a space for a few non-US girls to speak for themselves, constant processes of critique and reflection are necessary to accommodate any set of practices to the shifting contexts in which we operate. By acknowledging and working to correct these critiques, Girl Up and other activist campaigns can work toward a set of practices and discourse that work *together* instead of contradicting one another.

Chapter 3 | The Pixel Project: Spreading Genres in Opposition to Violence Against Women

In the previous chapter, I focused on Girl Up's practices of representation and how these representational practices compare to the rhetoric used to frame the organization's transnational work. I turn in this chapter to a focus on the ways another activist organization, The Pixel Project, combines digital platforms and rhetorical tactics in order to create "spreadable" genres. Through their creation of spreadable genres, the Pixel Project uses the affordances of social media to address diverse public audiences about violence against women.

Within rhetorical genre theory, many scholars work with Carolyn Miller's definition of genres as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (Miller 159). That is, over time, similar social situations occur, and the participants in those situations develop similar methods of using rhetoric to navigate those circumstances. For instance, the genre of the protest sign is a way for people engaged in a physical occupation of space, such as a protest march or rally, to make a contribution to the protest. A protest sign might be how a person adds his or her unique perspective to the group, a way to demonstrate affiliation with the group, or a way to show onlookers what the protest is about. For many sign holders, the sign might accomplish more than one social and rhetorical action; the point is that people in similar situations develop ways of using texts that share formal characteristics and social purposes and can be classified together as a genre.

In *Writing Genres*, Amy Devitt describes genres as "types of rhetorical actions that people perform in their everyday interactions with their worlds" (2). Understanding genres as individuals' interaction with their worlds is an important perspective for studying the genres used by digital activist communities, because this can help us understand how genres play a role in

developing communities. Understanding that genres are a part of everyday interactions might also help those who study digital activism to understand how some social networking genres develop (including those that are the subject of critique and debate because they require minimal effort). For many activist communities, engaging with genres involves a public performance: a way for a rhetor to (publicly) demonstrate membership within a public or connection to a public. Many current digital activist campaigns create discursive materials intended to spread among a variety of communities and audiences as a part of their participants' everyday interactions with social media. In this chapter, I explore the use of "spreadable" genres for digital publics' formation, awareness-raising, and activism.

Digital and Spreadable Genres

Most research to date on digital or internet genres focuses on blogs and website homepages (cf. Askehave and Nielsen; Miller and Shepherd; Dillon and Gushrowski; Rak). While these were important early web genres, and they are easily compared to their offline, antecedent genres (see Giltrow and Stein), a great deal of complex, compelling rhetorical activity remains understudied by rhetorical genre theorists. One compelling aspect of digital genres lies in their public nature; in contrast to print genres, many digital genres, even those with the purpose of intimate, in-group communication, can be more "public" than their offline antecedents or counterparts. This publicity is partly enabled by some of the affordances of digital media, such as interactivity, reach and mobility. Scholars have noted that the degree of textual, technical, and social interactivity of the internet and mobile phones allows individuals more opportunities to respond (to other individuals, to companies) than, say, radio or television (Baym

7).⁹ Since dialogue is a key component of public activity (c.f. Hauser; Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere”; Warner; Warnick and Heinemann), this increased opportunity for interaction enhances the potential for digital media to be used for public discourse. Digital media also have the potential to reach a much larger and more geographically widespread audience than previous forms of media available for everyday use by individuals (Baym 10). This reach can facilitate the formation and interaction of publics because there is a relatively low cost to distribute messages to a wide audience. This does not mean that a message is automatically distributed to a wide audience, or that people are automatically interested, just because digital media are used; rather, through the savvy use of digital media, an issue can more easily be publicized to a wide audience, and thus might reach more people who are interested or motivated to discuss the issue. Mobility is another important affordance of digital media that affects the publicity of digital genres. Whereas many older forms of media, such as the landline telephone or a face-to-face conversation, required individuals to be in a particular place at a particular time, some digital genres allow individuals to communicate at a wider range of times and places (Baym 11). Again, while this does not automatically facilitate public dialogue, this opens up more possibilities for individuals to engage in conversations that are important to them when they might otherwise not have been doing so (while waiting in line, or riding the bus, for example). Together, then, the affordances of digital media offer great potential for public activity. To use Dylan Dryer’s term, publicity is an “uptake-affordance” of many digital genres: the opportunity for public activity influences encounters with digital genres (n.p.). It is important to emphasize that there are

⁹ Though, of course, broadcast television as a medium doesn’t allow users to respond, work on convergence shows us that new media is often employed by individuals or groups who want to “talk back” or simply interact around television or radio (cf. Jenkins, 2006). Individuals and fan communities gather online and create wikis about their favorite shows, live-tweet current episodes (conversations in which shows’ actors, writers, and producers are often involved), write, edit and share fan fiction, and more.

multiple forms of public activity included in this concept of public uptake-affordances, and that digital genres often facilitate multiple and diffuse “uptake-enactments,” or actions taken in response to digital genres and their affordances (Dryer n.p.).

One helpful way to analyze the publicity afforded by digital genres is to examine the growing popularity of what I am calling *spreadable genres*, concurrent with the widespread adoption of social media. In *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green describe the ways in which social media and other digital platforms provide a means for individuals to interact by sharing material with one another. The authors describe the facilitation of sharing as aspects of media’s ‘spreadability,’ defining spreadability as follows:

‘Spreadability’ refers to the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community’s motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes. (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 4)

In *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins, Ford, and Green intend for their text to create dialogue between industry professionals, scholars, and audiences. While the authors explore a wide range of contexts in which spreadable media is relevant, the book focuses heavily on entertainment and commercial examples, due to the intended readership and the authors’ backgrounds. However, Jenkins, Ford, and Green call for other scholars to take up the ideas in their text. In this chapter, I explore some of the ways that rhetorical genre theory can be combined with the idea of spreadable media, offering insights to scholars in both rhetoric and media studies, while also adding to the examination of spreadability in activist contexts.

Jenkins, Ford, and Green's description of the different factors facilitating spreadable media offer rhetorical genre theorists a useful lens for examining the ways that cultural and technological contexts influence the development and use of genres. The social contexts in which rhetorical situations recur are key to understanding how genres work. As the above definition shows, the concept of "spreadability" brings together a variety of important contextual factors that are influencing the genres that communities use to achieve their purposes, and genre theorists might use Jenkins, Ford, and Green's insights to delve into these cultural patterns in order to bring new insights to the study of genres. As genre theorists consider the impact of mobile phones and internet technology on rhetorical practices, the cultural patterns identified in *Spreadable Media* can offer useful insights into multiple types of influence at play in digital communication.

Genre scholars' approach to understanding the rhetorical practices of individuals and communities, likewise, can offer useful ways for media studies scholars to examine more closely the ways in which specific textual choices serve social functions for communities. Carolyn Miller notes that "genres can serve both as an index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers" (165). Jenkins, Ford, and Green urge readers to attend to audiences and the ways that they respond to particular types of content. Genre theory offers opportunities for inquiring more specifically into rhetorical choices and their effects. For media studies scholars, this offers further insight into the ways that communities influence genres' emergence and spread. For communities and individuals, genre theory might help in the exploration of specific textual patterns and rhetorical effects; through this exploration, rhetors might make more informed and purposeful choices in their interactions with spreadable genres.

Many readers will be familiar with a variety of spreadable genres, even if the classification is new. For example, “Memes” offer many well-known examples of spreadable genres, including LOLcats, “Epic FAIL,” Grumpy Cat, and Doge. Sites like “Know Your Meme” (knowyourmeme.com) provide overviews, examples, and histories of these genres, functioning as meta-genres for different memes. Instagram photos are another example of spreadable genres. The overall genre of a square-cropped mobile phone photo with a filter applied might represent a broad genre, developed through a combination of cultural influences (an upsurge in popularity of the “look” of film photography—including both the use of old film cameras and the use of post-processing to mimic film effects in digital photos—as well as the cultural influence of social media, and the desire to share moments of everyday life with others who are not physically copresent) and technological affordances (such as the *interactivity* and *mobility* provided by mobile phones and smartphones with cameras, photo editing applications, and internet access, along with the *reach* of the world wide web and social media). Since mobile phone photos can be limited both by their user’s technique and the camera’s specifications, filters offer opportunities to stylize photos, making “phoneography” more presentable for sharing. Within this broad overall genre, which responds to the situation of wanting to share a moment from one’s day (analogously, pre-digital “vacation photos” as a very broad genre might be meant to document a place or experience, but contain a very wide range of content), are more specific genres such as food/drink photos¹⁰, “what I’m doing” photos¹¹, “where I stand” photos¹²,

¹⁰ Photos of what someone is eating or drinking, or is about to eat or drink.

¹¹ Photos of a person’s general surroundings, usually indicating an activity or a place, such as a photo of a computer screen and stack of books at the library to indicate that a person is studying.

¹² Photos of the camera pointing at the photographer’s feet, often to show something about where they are or what they’re doing; these may also be referred to as “from where I stand” photos.

pet photos, and “selfies.”¹³

Additionally, Instagram, one of the platforms through which these photos are produced and shared, is designed to allow the individual poster to share, or “spread,” their creations across other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Flickr. Apps or integrated log-in options on many social media platforms can link individuals’ social media accounts (so that Twitter or Pinterest activity is automatically posted to Facebook, for example), increasing the options for spreading digital genres among varied audiences. While some users may find this convenient, it takes a certain amount of savvy to understand the usefulness of this practice, as many individuals will have different networks/communities on different social media platforms. Individuals who merge professional and personal accounts may find friends losing interest in their material or colleagues receiving too much information about their private life. Some of these preferences may be personal, but this may also suggest that the community or network and the platform architecture influence the ways that genres develop and spread.

Of course, collecting and sharing content is not a brand new practice (Jenkins et al. cite Ellen Gruber Garvey’s research on 19th-century women scrapbookers), but new technological connectivity has increased the speed and scope of travel for many pieces of media. Jenkins, Ford, and Green describe an “emerging hybrid model of circulation, where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures,” explaining that “the decisions that each of us makes about whether to pass along media texts . . . are reshaping the media landscape itself” (1–2). The authors note that sharing material has become a common practice, noting that certain types of content “spread” more easily than others due to features of

¹³ Photos taken of the photographer, either by pointing the camera lens toward themselves (i.e., holding it backward), using a built-in camera feature that takes a photo in the reverse direction (e.g., with the screen showing the person looking at it), or by using reflection to capture one’s own image (in mirrors, windows, water). “Where I stand” photos, mentioned above, or photos of one’s shadow, might be considered a related genre.

the text, individual and community motivations and means of connection, technological affordances, and economic structures (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 4). Through a combination of social and cultural practices (widespread digital literacy, broad forms of online social connectivity, and the practice of communication through sharing), and technological affordances, individual texts or even sets of genre conventions can spread through various communities, and have a rhetorical impact through their circulation. One of these impacts is to help the formation and coordination of publics centered around activist issues.

Of course, not all pieces of media meant for this kind of spreadability are shared on the same scale. However, the concept of “spreadable genres” offers useful insights into digital activists’ rhetorical practices, and it is a helpful framework for understanding the public genres of the Pixel Project, which are the focus of this chapter. In the following case study, I examine the Pixel Project, an organization that uses spreadable genres in order to facilitate awareness and public dialogue about violence against women. In particular, I discuss two different genres used by the group, examining their construction as *spreadable* genres and their purpose to coordinate relations and carry out social actions for the group. A participant who takes up the Pixel Project’s spreadable genres helps the organization accomplish its goals in one way or another: by passing the genre along to someone who needs it, sharing a genre more generally to spread awareness, or using the genre herself, she participates in the public activity of the Pixel Project. Spreadable genres can help members identify with one another and with the Pixel Project, to spread messages of support, offer information to those who need help, educate nonparticipants, and to gain participants or support for the Pixel Project’s cause.

Before discussing the specific genres of the Pixel Project, I first contextualize my approach within rhetorical genre studies. In the following section, I explain how theories of genre and uptake can contribute to our understanding of how and why texts spread.

Spreadability as Uptake

Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green explain that “an array of online communication tools has arisen to facilitate informal and instantaneous sharing” (2). For Jenkins, Ford, and Green, these “tools” include digital technologies and platforms for sharing and hosting communicative content, such as social networking websites and microblogging platforms (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 30). Media, for the authors, is used to refer to both the specific means of transmitting communication, as well as the social practices that occur around these communication technologies. These communication tools and technological affordances are not the only factor contributing to media’s “spreadability”; the authors also point to the importance of textual features, cultural norms, economic structures, and social connections in enabling spreadability.

In this chapter, I propose that genre theory can extend Jenkins, Ford, and Green’s concept of spreadability in important ways. Genre theory can help us understand how individual agency and social purposes play a role in spreading material: creators of a text make specific rhetorical choices to facilitate the spread of that text, and individuals who encounter a text also make choices about whether, how, and with whom to share that text. Jenkins, Ford, and Green’s media studies approach focuses on communication systems, cultural norms, and other patterns and processes that facilitate spreadability. Throughout their discussion of spreadability, however, the authors reinforce the importance of the agency and choice of individuals in this process:

Different technological choices, then, can shape the uses the public makes of media

content, facilitating some while constraining others, but technologies can never be designed to absolutely control how material gets deployed within a given social and cultural context. Indeed, both popular and niche uses of technology always emerge far outside anything foreseen by the designer (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 38).

The individual rhetors who engage in creating and spreading texts are central to the processes of spreading material. Moreover, a focus on spreadable *genres* allows for attention to the social actions enabled through this process of spreading. Thus, to extend Jenkins, Ford, and Green's work to focus on the implications of spreadability for rhetorical studies, spreadability can be usefully understood in the context of rhetorical genre theory, particularly the notion of "uptake." To give a very brief overview of this term, uptake is a concept from speech act theory, taken up by genre theorists, which refers to the ways that texts respond to one another, or to the ways that texts are translated into action. Two genres might respond to one another through the process of uptake, such as a job advertisement and a resume. In this example, sending one's resume to a business is one possible "uptake" of the job advertisement. In another example, placing an order for food in a restaurant is one possible uptake of the genre of a menu. Neither the menu nor the job advertisement need to request these uptakes in order for them to occur (though sometimes they might). Often, uptakes occur as a result of individuals' previous experiences and knowledge of a genre and the context in which it occurs.

Rhetorical genre theorists often discuss uptake as the interaction between texts, and as the relationship between text and action. Anne Freedman, in her discussion of uptake, explains that uptake "selects, defines, or represents its object"; she posits uptake as an act of translation, with specific intentions for the outcome, which is informed by the genres and uptakes preceding it (48). Uptake, as a specific choice from a set of possible choices, includes an interpretation on

the part of the person engaging in that uptake. Kimberly Emmons describes uptake as “a performative and interpretive [act],” and Heather Bastian sees uptake as “a performance that occurs within everyday life” (140; 55). In a public context, selecting and sharing material can be a way for individuals and groups to perform cultural and political identification. Jenkins, Ford, and Green articulate the ways in which the spreading of texts (broadly defined) shapes our “cultural and political landscape” (44). Spreading genres, as a form of uptake, shapes individuals’ public identities and social relationships, and often does so as a part of individuals’ everyday rhetorical activity.

Drawing attention to the ways in which uptake can work collectively and individually within social systems, Emmons notes that “in most scholarship on uptake, analysis focuses on sequences of texts at the expense of attending to individual, embodied subjectivities” (136). To extend Emmons’ theorization of uptake’s individual and collective functions, I propose that one important function of uptake with spreadable genres is to mediate between the individual and the collective. Individuals who take up an activist genre by spreading it—by sharing a blog post or retweeting a message, for example—are also making themselves visible to the activist public and performing their identity as an activist. As Bastian notes, “uptake helps us better imagine the ways in which individuals assert an (somewhat) individual agency within a social agency” (58–59).

Likewise, knowledge of genres and previous uptakes influences individuals’ decision to choose a specific uptake in relation to his or her needs and desires within a particular context. Anis Bawarshi discusses this relationship between genre, uptake, and agency, describing how individual actors within genre systems become “double agents”; a writer is “both an agent of his or her desires and actions and an agent on behalf of already existing desires and actions” (50).

The decision to create or share a text occurs within what Bawarshi calls “the ideological interstices that configure, normalize, and activate relations and meanings within and between systems of genres” (653). As individuals encounter digital, activist genres, their interaction with those genres is shaped by their previous experiences: experiences with digital communication, experiences as participants in advocacy and activist campaigns, experiences with the cause addressed in the genre. These experiences will influence the ways in which different individuals “take up” a genre in this context.

Finally, uptake is central to understanding genres as social action. Heather Bastian notes that uptake “creates meanings within and between [genres and genre systems] by activating the social actions of genres” (26). According to Bastian, “What occurs within these intervening spaces (the configuration, activation, and normalization of relations and meanings) mediate[s] and influence[s] people’s perceptions and understandings of others and of the world” (Bastian 27). Uptakes can be understood as the linkages in complex chains of discursive interactions through which an individual’s relationship to her social context is negotiated. Jenkins, Ford, and Green note that “As material spreads, it gets remade: either literally, through various forms of sampling and remixing, or figuratively, via its insertion into ongoing conversations and interactions” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 27). As individuals choose to spread genres, their identities are also “remade”—or, perhaps more accurately, simply continue to be made in the never-finished process of identity-making. Individuals who choose to take up a genre by spreading it perform acts of interpretation and meaning-making. If I make a choice to spread a video, for example, on my Facebook page, I am interpreting the video as relevant to me, and also to at least some of my Facebook friends. I am performing an interpretive act in making this decision, and my friends will do the same when they see that I have shared the video. I am

adding that video to a collection of shared material (my “wall” or profile) that says something about me (explicitly and implicitly).

Similarly, there are multiple ways in which creating or spreading genres for an activist public are techniques for individuals’ negotiation of their identities in relation to that public and its cause. Thus, spreadability might be a fruitful term for considering the public performances of genres and their uptakes in digital contexts. In the next section of this chapter, I propose that certain online activist genres are designed with spreadability in mind, and that this spreadability is an integral part of building activist publics through digital media. In order to do this, I examine two digital genres used by the Pixel Project, an organization devoted to transnational digital campaigns that oppose violence against women. Each genre has a unique purpose, is composed using the affordances of a particular online platform, and reaches out to a specific audience or set of audiences; together, the genres show how the Pixel Project brings multiple publics together and coordinates multiple uptakes in support of their cause.

Forum Analysis of The Pixel Project

Background and Purpose

The Pixel Project describes itself as “a global, virtual, 501 (c)(3) registered nonprofit organisation which works to [take] fund-and-awareness raising for the cause to end violence against women (VAW) into the 21st Century by delivering innovative, powerful viral campaigns across various online and virtual channels including social media” (Pixel Project, “The Pixel Project -- An Introduction”). The organization’s purpose is to unite a public in order to end violence against women, as expressed in the campaign’s tagline: “It’s time to stop violence against women. Together” (Pixel Project, “Home Page”). The ways in which The Pixel Project situates itself, both as global and virtual, and in describing its campaigns as “viral,” correlates

with the concept of spreadable media. Jenkins, Ford, and Green argue for using a concept like “spreadable” instead of “viral,” noting that although biological metaphors such as viruses and memes have gained popularity in both public and scholarly conversations, metaphors that describe popular, widely-spread media as “viral” neglect the ways that viewing and choosing to pass along the content involves active decision-making on the part of the individuals who help the content spread: “Audiences play an active role ‘spreading’ content rather than serving as passive carriers of viral media: their choices, investments, agendas, and actions determine what gets valued” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 29). Although the Pixel Project uses the more commonplace term “viral,” the intended meaning of the term seems to be that their campaigns become widespread, and their media are seen by many individuals and communities. As my focus on publics and rhetoric may suggest, I am interested in the agency of the individuals who pass these materials along, and therefore I will use the term “spreadable” instead of “viral.”

In some ways, the concept of “spreadable media” may explain the flood of information and the complex structure encountered when visiting the Pixel Project’s website. As the analysis of Girl Up in the previous chapter revealed, providing an overview of an online forum and the genre systems with which participants interact is no simple task. The networked nature of many digital campaigns means that each campaign includes a website with many sections and several social media accounts; these campaign-hosted platforms tell part of the story. Journalistic coverage by regional, special-interest, and global news media or blogging channels provides additional insight into the campaigns, the people behind them, and their reach. Individuals participate in these campaigns in a wide variety of ways: by “liking” or following social media accounts, visiting websites, contributing material through social media or blogs, sharing material, and, of course, thinking about and discussing the ideas encountered through the campaign in less

branded and visible ways, online or off. Most campaigns work with partners, which might include like-minded nonprofit organizations, funding or sponsorship partners, and nongovernmental organizations.

Even amid this expected complexity, the Pixel Project has an especially complex structure. The website is difficult to read in full because it contains so many sections and links to specific Pixel Project campaigns that have their own websites; staying on the site while also exploring all of its features becomes difficult. This could be interpreted as a design flaw. However, another way of explaining this structure might be to see the website as a hub linking the many different campaigns and their genres together. If the Pixel Project hopes to engage diverse publics, the different types of material may not all be applicable to every user; therefore, the structure of the site encourages participants to navigate toward the content most appealing or applicable to them.

The Pixel Project's origins and focus are explicitly transnational. The organization was founded by Regina Yau, in partnership with Malaysia's Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), in order to help the organization raise funds. A description of the organization's history explains that Yao "agreed to run the project in aid of WAP on one condition – that WAO shared the funds with another Violence Against Women non-profit organization in another country, preferably the USA as the project aimed to raise US\$1 million in funds" (Pixel Project, "Our History"). Since then, the Pixel Project has partnered with an organization in the US (the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, or NCADV) and "mutually and amicably" parted ways with the WAO (Pixel Project, "Our History"). The Pixel Project's organizational history, then, actually serves to illustrate its transnational nature.

Audience

The Pixel Project's main website features a variety of links to information, awareness- and fund-raising campaigns, tweets, blog posts, and more. In addition to its webpage and blog, the Pixel Project has accounts on multiple social media sites, including a LinkedIn group with 208 members, a Twitter account with 16,900 followers, a Facebook page with 13,000 likes, and a YouTube channel. Audience members include women who are victims or survivors of violence, and men and women who are able to support the cause by raising awareness and serving as positive role models.

Speakers and Writers

The Pixel Project's team of leaders includes individuals from a variety of countries and backgrounds, mostly residing in Malaysia and the US, but also India, the United Kingdom, and South Africa; former volunteers have also come from Belgium, Australia, China, Singapore, and Jamaica. Some volunteers' descriptions include graduate degrees, some include affiliations with other NGOs and activist work, and some include descriptions of experience with domestic violence in their families. Website, blog, and social media posts are typically composed by campaign volunteers. Users can submit content for different campaigns, and this content is then published by the Pixel Project, so that the team essentially decides who speaks and writes by deciding whether or not to publish a submission (though the public material on the site doesn't indicate whether they reject submissions). Speakers and writers appear to be selected based on their interest in preventing violence against women and/or their experiences with violence against women. Sometimes general feminist or women's rights activists are spotlighted, as well (e.g. Laura Bates of the Everyday Sexism Project).

Topics

The rhetoric of the Pixel Project centers around the organization's goal of ending violence against women. Personal experiences with violence against women, support for the organization's goals, and resources for victims of violence are common topics covered in the campaign's rhetoric. The Pixel Project engages in a variety of campaigns that target different audiences in different ways and uses various genres to discuss topics relevant to violence against women.

The Pixel Project uses interconnected genre sets in order to target different groups of people for different purposes. The variety and range of genres used by the organization indicates their understanding that different genres will resonate with different people in different contexts. There are lists of ways for men to help in stopping violence against women. There are fact sheets about different forms of violence and checklists for victims or their friends and family that offer suggestions for leaving and getting help. On Twitter, tweets regularly point to resources for individuals in different countries. Together, these might be considered a genre set, or even several interconnected sets. Amy Devitt notes that "A group usually operates through a set of genres to achieve the group's purposes, but the nature of that genre set varies in different types of groups" (58). In particular, Devitt notes the connection between the type of group (i.e., how the people in a group are connected) and the ways in which the genres they use relate to one another (58). The Pixel Project uses genres that are likely to have meaning to individuals involved in activist pursuits, as well as those struggling with experiences with violence. The variety and range of genres used by the organization indicate their understanding that different genres will resonate with different people, in different contexts; therefore, producing a range of genres is a strategy that will likely reach a variety of populations and produce a variety of effects.

Sample Selection and Methodology

In this chapter, I analyze two of the Pixel Project's genres in order to determine how they serve the Pixel Project publicly and rhetorically. The Pixel Project has a variety of online campaigns, some of which run at certain times of the year (e.g., during the international sixteen days of activism against gender violence, during the month of June, etc.), and some of which are ongoing, year-round projects. In selecting the genres for analysis, I considered a variety of features such as the platform and modes used to produce and disseminate the genres, as well as the intended audience and purpose of the genres. I am interested in the ways these spreadable genres are used to build a public; in choosing two genres, I intended to indicate that the Pixel Project accomplishes this public-building in multiple ways, through the use of different spreadable genres. The two genres I will examine in this chapter are a type of informational Twitter post I call the "helpline tweet" and a genre of blog post that is called the "'30 for 30' Father's Day Campaign" interview. Each genre used by the Pixel Project corresponds to a unique combination of platform, communicative purpose, and audience. Because I examined these two genres using different sampling procedures, I discuss this aspect of the methodology with the genre analysis in the next section. Together, the analyses show how the Pixel Project's spreadable genres work to reach and engage multiple publics in support of the Pixel Project.

Analyzing the Pixel Project's Spreadable Genres

As I mention above, Jenkins, Ford, and Green note that as material is spread, it can become remade. In this way, spreadable genres facilitate multiple and diffuse uptakes. As genres are spread in particular contexts by particular individuals, they "become meaningful because they are played within certain rules and boundaries" (Bawarshi and Reiff 84). Retweeting a Pixel Project tweet about resources for victims of domestic violence might function to identify someone as a supporter of the Pixel Project or an ally to women who need help with a domestic

violence situation. Visiting the link might educate another participant on the kinds of resources available to women who need help. Calling a phone number might be an important step for a woman who is trying to escape a situation in which she faces domestic violence. These are several ways that a genre might be taken up by participants in different ways, all of which are important social actions for the Pixel Project. Through this use of multiple, spreadable genres to reach a variety of individuals, the Pixel Project attempts to construct a diverse public around the issue of violence against women and to organize and coordinate social actions that help the Pixel Project's cause.

Helpline Tweets

The first spreadable genre I examine is a "helpline tweet." I created this label for the genre based on the language commonly used to refer to communication on Twitter (as "tweets"), as well as the Pixel Project's own rhetoric, in which a series of tweets are referred to as a "daily Violence Against Women Helpline Re-Tweet session" (Pixel Project, "Our Daily Violence"). The helpline tweet is one of several Twitter genres used by the Pixel Project. Other Twitter-based genres include promotional tweets for current campaigns (e.g., "NEW SONG AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD FOR FREE! We are proud to present our "30 Artists, 30 Songs, 30 Days" project... fb.me/21h6gSBDJ"), tweets about other domestic-violence-related organizations and projects (e.g., "Shalom Bayit: grassroots organization dedicated to empowering battered Jewish women. shalom-bayit.org"), and tweets that direct followers toward domestic violence resources in various regions and languages via links (e.g., "Domestic Violence resources in Brazil (Portuguese) - bit.ly/5ZsGol," or "Domestic Violence resources in Ireland - bit.ly/7yeNvj") (Pixel Project "PixelProject on Twitter"). These genres are mixed in various ways in the Twitter feed for the campaign. Often, a series of tweets in the same genre will be

posted sequentially; tweets relating to a region (e.g., Israel or Brazil) may also be grouped together (i.e., posted sequentially).

In order to analyze the genre of the helpline tweet, I collected all tweets from the Pixel Project's twitter account for a one-week period (from February 1st-7th, 2014), which resulted in a selection of 565 tweets. I then gathered the "helpline tweets" that occurred within this selection. For my sample, I defined the helpline tweet as a tweet that included contact information in the tweet itself; in most cases, this means that the tweet includes a phone number that women in a particular country or region can call for help (for one organization, a Twitter handle and email address are provided, but no phone number). The tweet typically identifies the audience of the organization (e.g., women in a particular area) and the purpose of the helpline (e.g., "to report human trafficking," or "for help with domestic violence"). Three hundred sixty four tweets out of the sample, or 65%, were helpline tweets, making this genre a substantial portion of the Pixel Project's Twitter activity.

The helpline tweet is primarily circulated via Twitter and is one of several spreadable genres used by the Pixel Project to point victims of violence toward help. The genre is posted daily by the campaign's "Twitter Tag Team." Helpline tweets are posted primarily in English, as are most of the campaign's materials, through the Pixel Project's official Twitter account. Tweets in other languages, such as Haitian Creole or Spanish, are occasionally posted, as well. The Twitter Tag Team members are volunteers who are charged with regularly sending out tweets for the organization. Team members work in shifts, typically signing in and out of their shift with a tweet that tells followers their name or their personal Twitter handle, e.g. "This is @_anubha signing on with your latest #VAW tweets and facts. Please share!" (Pixel Project, "This Is @_anubha").

The following helpline tweet, for example, is intended to spread, via Twitter, to women in India: “#INDIA: For women facing sexual abuse & domestic violence, call 8793088814 /15 /16 (This is a 24/7 helpline) #VAW” (Pixel Project,

“#INDIA”). This style of Twitter message is a

regular occurrence in the Pixel Project’s Twitter

feed. Volunteers for the Pixel Project regularly

tweet phone numbers and similar resources for



FIGURE 3.1: HELPLINE TWEET FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA (PIXEL PROJECT, “#INDIA”).

different countries, or sometimes even a particular region within a country. These tweets can

often be identified with a hashtag for the country, and possibly also a #VAW hashtag, which

identifies the tweet as relevant to that country and to those interested in the topic of violence

against women (VAW), respectively. Because hashtags can both gather and generate

conversation, their use in this genre serves important social functions for the Pixel Project’s

public. Hashtags emerged on Twitter as a means of labeling and classifying tweets according to

relevant topics. Users can then follow the conversation emerging around a particular topic by

following the tweets that use the hashtag, either by setting up a customized feed or by simply

clicking on the hashtag in a particular tweet (the former will be useful for those interested in

monitoring a topic over an extended period of time, while the latter might be more useful for a

spontaneous or more short-lived interaction with a topic). Scholars have noted that hashtags are a

part of Twitter users’ folksonomy (Gruzd, Wellman, and Takhteyev 1301; Gleason 967) and

serve conversational functions, helping individuals to find and contribute to conversations on

Twitter (Huang, Thornton, and Efthimiadis 3, 5). Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira

contend that “hashtags present a user-generated collaborative argument on what is news” (268).

While the audience for the helpline tweet above would seem to be those in India (or who know

people in India) who need help with domestic violence (and read English), there may also be a larger audience. Some audience members will see this tweet and form an impression of who the Pixel Project is as an organization, and what their purpose is; others might retweet the information as a way of identifying with the Pixel Project or the public discourse about violence against women, thus using this genre as a way of performing this public identity.

Users of the helpline tweet are interacting around the Pixel Project's general theme of "violence against women," but also around a specific aspect of that topic. Whereas some genres promote awareness-raising, political activism, or fundraising, this particular genre appears to offer a kind of immediate assistance to victims of domestic violence. The reappearance of the tweets (the Twitter Team cycles through them regularly) may work to reinforce the helpline resources (the name and/or number of the organization or helpline for people in a particular region). These tweets almost always include the name of the country to which they apply, often at the beginning of the tweet (sometimes marked as a hashtag, as in the #INDIA example above) and a telephone number. Other common elements of the genre include the name of the organization with which the phone number will connect callers, a description of the organization's area of concern or focus (e.g., domestic violence, missing persons, trafficking, rape), and, as mentioned earlier, the hashtag #VAW. Occasionally, the tweets are preceded by a request that followers share the information, such as "Pls RT" (please retweet) or "please share." This explicit request for followers to retweet the message shows how spreadability is a key goal of this particular genre; beyond simply using a genre and platform that include the possibility, the campaign representatives specify retweeting as a desirable uptake for other members of this public. Through the retweet, the Pixel Project can reach a wider audience with this information, while also expanding the public engaged in stopping violence against women.

'30 for 30' Father's Day Campaign Interviews

Although women who are victims or survivors of violence are central to the Pixel Project's rhetorical activity, they are not the only public addressed through the organization's spreadable genres. The second genre I've chosen to examine is the "'30 for 30' Father's Day Campaign Interview" (hereafter, the "30 for 30" interview), a genre which specifically engages men. This genre uses a different platform (the Pixel Project's blog), and also varies in its purpose, which might be said to work toward *preventing* violence from occurring. According to the Pixel Project's description of the "'30 for 30' Father's Day Campaign," the "30 for 30" interviews are meant to

"30 For 30" Father's Day Campaign 2012 Interview 1: Asohan Aryaduray, 49, Malaysia

Welcome to [The Pixel Project's "30 For 30" Father's Day Campaign 2012!](#) In honour of Father's Day, we created this campaign:

- To acknowledge the vital role Dads play in families, cultures and communities worldwide.
- To showcase good men from different walks of life who are fabulous positive non-violent male role models.

Through this campaign, we will be publishing a short interview with a different Dad on each day of the month of June.

Our first "30 For 30" Dad is **Asohan Aryaduray from Malaysia.**

"acknowledge the vital role Dads play in families, cultures and

FIGURE 3.2: EXAMPLE OF THE "30 FOR 30" INTERVIEW TITLE AND INTRODUCTION (PIXEL PROJECT, "ASOHAN").

communities worldwide" and to "provide men who are fabulous non-violent male role models with a space to publicly share their ideas, thoughts and feelings about how Dads can actively help prevent and stop violence against women" ("Announcement: 30 for 30").

Emphasizing the role of men in stopping and preventing violence against women is an important strategy for the Pixel Project. On the website's main menu, one option is visiting "The Men's Room," which offers advice to men, starting with an explanation of why violence against women is a men's issue and including resources for recognizing and stopping violence against women, as well as specific things men can do, such as "prevention through example and

education,” “intervention,” “activism,” and “self-awareness” (Pixel Project, “What YOU Can Do”). The “30 for 30” interviews fit this strategy, providing interviews with men that ask interviewees to be self-aware and to offer their advice for prevention, intervention, or activism. The strategy of specifically addressing men and highlighting their role in violence against women is important: unlike the previous genre—in which the focus is on identifying and assisting victims, who are women—this genre works to identify and engage a public of men because men often perpetrate this violence; thus, this genre attempts to spread in a way that will address the *cause* of violence against women, rather than its effects.

The “30 for 30” interviews appear on the Pixel Project’s blog, which is on a section of the main website. The genres are also spread (i.e., linked to or “shared”) via the Pixel Project’s social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter. The genre is produced and disseminated during the month of June, in honor of Father’s Day. The “30 for 30” campaign aims to publish an interview with a father every day during the month of June. (This genre also relates to another genre of blog post called “Inspirational Interviews,” which are usually interviews with activists or women role models.) The campaign has occurred during June 2012 and 2013, so there are 60 blog posts total; I chose a sample of 10% to analyze in further detail for this chapter. Each blog post’s title includes the campaign title, the interview number, and the name, age and location of the father interviewed. Each post also includes a brief overview of the campaign and the justification for it. This choice is appropriate for a genre intended to spread. Readers who click on a link that takes them directly to this blog post (e.g., from their Facebook news feed or a friend’s tweet) will understand the context and purpose of this interview and its relationship to an organization dedicated to stopping violence against women.

The blog post then includes a short “Dad Bio (In His Own Words)” and answers to three questions:

1. What is the best thing about being a Dad?
2. A dad is usually the first male role model in a person’s life and fathers do have a significant impact on their sons’ attitude towards women and girls. How has your father influenced the way you see and treat women and girls?
3. Communities and activists worldwide are starting to recognise that violence against women is not a “women’s issue” but a human rights issue and that men play a role in stopping the violence. How do you think fathers and other male role models can help get young men and boys to take an interest in and step up to help prevent and stop violence against women? (Pixel Project, “Asohan Aryaduray”)

Through these questions and the accompanying photos, readers of the interviews are able to associate the Pixel Project’s message with individual people and stories, while also getting a sense of participants’ diversity through the different faces, places, and experiences shared by interviewees. In focusing on men and their role in stopping violence against women, these interviews send an important ideological message: violence against women is an issue that concerns men. This genre, then, integrates men into the public discourse of the Pixel Project.

In the photos and interview responses, interview participants are situated as “everyday” role models. Fathers share their own experiences as sons, grandsons, and brothers as well as fathers, explaining how the men in their life modeled the right or wrong ways to treat women. In one blog post, the photo shows Asohan, a father in Malaysia, posing with his two teenage daughters. The interview text tells readers that he is a single father (Pixel Project, “Asohan Aryaduray”). Another blog post features a photo of a father walking through a market with his

toddler son atop his shoulders. The interview, of a father named William, tells of experiences in two different cultures (Kenya and the United States) and highlights the value of fatherhood for him: “My son is my greatest achievement” (Pixel Project, “William Odongo”). A third post includes a photo of James, a father in the United States, smiling behind his daughter, who poses for the camera with brightly-colored ice cream on her nose and chin (Pixel Project, “James Allison”). These examples reach out to multiple publics by relating different experiences with fatherhood and family to the Pixel Project’s work.

Members of the Pixel Project’s public might take up this genre in several ways. By sharing the blog posts with others (e.g., by sharing the link on social media), individuals can help highlight men’s relationship to this issue; this uptake might promote the idea that men have a responsibility to both speak out against violence against women, and to model appropriate



FIGURE 3.3: SHARING OPTIONS ON “30 FOR 30” BLOG POSTS (PIXEL PROJECT, “WILLIAM”).

behavior for others, especially

younger men. A woman who shares a “30 for 30” interview

might be calling on the men she

knows to take up this

responsibility; a man sharing the “30 for 30” interview might be identifying himself as a member of this public and suggesting that he supports other men who do the same. These uptakes are enabled by the features of this blog, which includes a “Share this post!” button at the bottom of each blog post. When a reader places their cursor over the button, a menu of sharing options appears. Clicking on one of nine square logos in the menu puts the blog post’s information into a post format appropriate for that website (the website options are Twitter, Digg, Facebook, Del.icio.us, StumbleUpon, Google Bookmarks, LinkedIn, Yahoo Buzz, and Technorati).

Conclusion

The two examples presented here offer just a glimpse of the ways in which spreadable genres allow activists to use the affordances of digital platforms in order to enact specific rhetorical strategies. Through spreadable genres that address multiple publics, the Pixel Project works to organize, coordinate, and perform public, social actions for participants. The genre of the helpline tweet reaches out to a public of victims with resources for help, while also reminding other publics of important elements of the Pixel Project's mission: that violence against women is always, now, affecting women, that it is a problem across geographic boundaries, and that it is an issue for which sharing/spreading discourse is an uptake that might help. The genre of the "30 for 30" interview reaches out to men, as role models, fathers, and sons, emphasizing that men play a key role in stopping violence against women. This genre encourages men to enact, support, and reward healthy, nonviolent relationships with women, making men's uptakes of the genre not only multiple, but central to the goals of the campaign. Women who read and share enactments of this genre can emphasize the importance of men to the work of the Pixel Project.

Arjun Appadurai has written about the increasing speed with which people, objects, and ideas flow across geographic and national boundaries, a growth in transnational traffic that includes activist discourses (4). "Likewise," Appadurai notes, "this current period—approximately from the nineteen seventies to the present—is characterized by the flows not just of cultural substances, but also of cultural forms, such as the novel, the ballet, the political

constitution, and divorce, to pick just a few examples”¹⁴ (7). Appadurai goes on to connect this “flow of forms” to transformations in historical and epistemological processes, noting that

the global is not merely the accidental site of the fusion or confusion of circulating global elements. It is the site of the mutual transformation of circulating forms, such as the nation and the novel . . . the ‘work of the imagination’ and the circulation of forms produce localities not by the hybridization of contents, art, ideology, or technology, but by the negotiation and mutual tensions between each other. It is this negotiation which creates the complex containers which further shape the actual contents of local practice. (10–11)

Appadurai speaks of broad, abstract cultural and material flows, yet his points may help us consider the implications of spreadability for the study of genres and their public performances. Spreadable genres provide rich material for rhetorical analysis and offer an especially compelling site for analyzing the complexities of transnational rhetoric. Scholars such as Rebecca Dingo and Mary Queen address the importance of understanding how rhetorics travel; rhetorical genre theorists might bring this discussion into conversation with the ways that genres spread across geographic borders and cultural contexts. Perhaps, as Appadurai suggests, the spread of genres is linked to creative interventions: “Indeed, the circulation of forms produces new and distinct genre experiments, many of which are forced to coexist in uneven and uneasy combinations” (Appadurai 10). What can the idea of spreadability bring to our understanding of genre and the growing body of work theorizing uptake? As Bawarshi and Reiff explain, rhetorical genres are

¹⁴ Appadurai is, of course, not a rhetorical genre theorist, so it is useful to clarify how he is using the term “form.” To do so, I offer his own explanation: “By ‘forms’ I mean to indicate a family of phenomena, including styles, techniques, or genres, which can be inhabited by specific voices, contents, messages, and materials. Unfortunately, the philosophical conundrum of separating form from content cannot be unraveled in this essay. In using the word ‘form’ I simply wish to temporarily place the issue of global circulation on a slightly more abstract level” (9).

“both organizing *and* generating kinds of texts and social actions, in complex, dynamic relation to one another” (Bawarshi and Reiff 4). With this in mind, we might use the idea of spreadability to consider how and why genre enactments, and genres themselves, spread. Further, following Appadurai, we might consider how this spread interacts with cultural processes. As genres spread, they reach multiple publics; their uptakes coordinate activity and negotiate meaning. The genres outlined above are just two examples of the many genres used by the Pixel Project. What I hope my analysis has shown is that the Pixel Project organizers, in their use of a variety of spreadable genres, use the affordances of digital media and the practice of spreading to work toward an activist public engaged in opposition to violence against women. By capitalizing on the affordances of digital media, spreadable genres and their uptakes offer ways for everyday, social actions to involve meaningful public engagement.

Chapter 4 | The Uprising of Women in the Arab World: Interrupting a Revolution

While chapter 3 examines how spreadable genres combine rhetorical strategies and digital platforms in order to reach multiple publics, my work in chapter 4 extends this work by examining the ways a specific activist campaign uses a spreadable genre for a different purpose: in order to interrupt existing rhetorics. In the following case study, I examine a ‘grassroots’ movement called ‘The Uprising of Women in the Arab World’ (UWAW). I focus specifically on the campaign’s use of the affordances of social media and the rhetorical tactic of interruption in order to build transnational activist dialogue. UWAW began in October of 2011 as a Facebook page, described by its founders as “an urgent reaction” to the Arab Spring uprisings. As the movement grew, its use of platforms spread to include a website with a blog, as well as accounts on Twitter and Flickr. Later campaigns, both online and offline, increased membership and garnered publicity for the movement. The movement’s founders specifically considered the use of social media during the Arab Spring when they decided to use social media to launch their movement (Abbas).

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which participants connect with UWAW as a movement, and with one another, through a photo genre organized primarily on Facebook. Through this campaign, UWAW uses multimodal and multilingual rhetoric, combining text, imagery, video, Arabic, and English to reach multiple publics, both within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond. Members share their stories, articulating the conditions of their lives and their commitment to the movement’s goals. In this chapter, I look specifically at how UWAW uses the rhetorical tactic of interruption (drawing attention to, and intervening in, discourses that marginalize women) to engage participants in building an understanding of the different conditions and experiences of women in Middle-Eastern and

North African countries. Through a photo campaign made up of submissions from UAWAW participants, UAWAW develops a transnational conversation through social media that interrupts public and everyday discourses.

Interruption as a Feminist Rhetorical Tactic

In “Interrupting Our Way to Agency: Feminist Cultural Studies and Composition,” Nedra Reynolds outlines a theory of interruption as one means toward empowering women speakers and writers. Reynolds’ theorization of interruption is itself an interruption, positioned generally as an intervention in postmodern theories that deny marginalized subjects’ agency. In articulating what it means to interrupt, Reynolds relies on comparisons to spoken discourse, while also drawing on Stuart Hall’s conceptualization of theoretical interventions as “breaks” (898-899). The most explicit definition Reynolds provides for interruption is that “unexpected interruptions, defined as either breaks or overlaps, by their suddenness or surprise factor, force others to pay attention” (898). However, Reynolds also shows how interruption works through her own piece, and through examples of other feminists’ practices. In particular, she “interrupts” Stuart Hall’s narrative about feminists’ disruption of cultural studies by calling attention to his marginalization of feminist contributions and then redefines interruption to focus on feminists’ practices of interruption in both spoken and written discourses. In brief, interruption can be defined as breaking into dominant discourses to call attention to marginalization and exclusion, “by drawing attention to all forms of silencing and then linking the silencing to ideological structures of racism and sexism” (902). What makes interruption feminist is not simply the intervention in discourse, but the ways in which that intervention participates in drawing attention to the politics behind exclusion and silencing.

For this project, interruption is particularly important because it draws attention to the ways in which rhetorical practices constitute activist work. Reynolds associates interruption with possibilities for agency in both writing practices and activist discourses, especially for those whose identities and opinions are marginalized within the dominant discourse. She connects activist purposes and writing processes to agency, noting that “feminists need a concept of agency in order to work and hope for social change; writers need a concept of agency in order to write a page, make a claim, or extend an idea” (Reynolds 897). For Reynolds, then, there are multiple places along the continuum of discursive participation in which agency plays an important role. Reynolds describes interruption both as a way of asserting agency and a means toward agency. Rather than an oversight, I interpret Reynolds’ variation here as indicative of the multiple ways that interruption and agency can work in discourse. If interruption is a way for marginalized speakers and writers to command attention, interruption can serve an important agentive purpose at various points along the continuum mentioned above. In addition to this idea that interruption can take place at various points, it is important to note that interruption may not necessarily accomplish all of the discursive work that needs to be done. Drawing on an analogy with spoken discourse, Reynolds points out that, “Although butting in and yelling louder than anyone else may not be strategies that endure—their effectiveness may be limited to kairotic moments—they can sometimes be satisfactorily interventionist” (898). This aspect of interruption is important to my analysis. Interruption may not solve the entire problem to which activists are drawing attention; however, it is an important part of activist work, and one that can be accomplished through strategic use of digital media. I return to this idea at the end of the chapter. In the next section, I connect Reynolds’ theorization of interruption to my research foci on interventions in public and everyday discourses.

Public Discourse, Everyday Practices, and Interruption

Reynolds' comparison of interruption with both spoken discourse and scholarly work draws together the "everyday" and the "public," a task which is also enabled through digital communication. Digital media provide increased opportunities for everyday interactions to overlap with public activity (through the affordances discussed in chapter 3). Scholars who examine the nature of public discourse in online contexts often point to the ways that features of digital communication complicate previous notions of "public" (Howard; boyd; Livingstone; Papacharissi). Many scholars also explore the various ways in which digital communication complicates notions of public and private. For instance, Graham Meikle and Sherman Young argue that social media such as Facebook blur previous distinctions between personal and public communication (59). However, in focusing on this distinction, Meikle and Young explain personal communications as "one-to-one" messages, in which messages are addressed to one audience; "public" messages, for Meikle and Young, are characterized as "addressed to no one in particular" (68). For Facebook communication among members of the Uprising of Women in the Arab World (and many activist groups), the notion of publicity requires a more complex notion of what "public" communication entails—one that moves beyond the contrast between personal and broadcast media. Messages are not addressed to one person, or to "no one in particular," but are addressed to public audiences. These audiences are specific, though their public nature makes addressing them through everyday social media a complex rhetorical act. Burgess, Foth, and Klaebe argue for a theorization of publics that includes multiple forms of engagement, attending to "the ways in which the ephemeral encounters and connections that occur in and around everyday life and popular culture might have democratic effects beyond themselves" (3). Burgess, Foth, and Klaebe focus on defining practices of cultural citizenship, drawing attention

to the ways that vernacular creative practices, such as digital storytelling or photography, can facilitate meaningful civic engagement. For example, photographers in Brisbane interact through a Flickr group called “Brisbanites,” engaging in discussions of local history and culture, which adds to participants’ sense of belonging and leads to further community engagement. The authors characterize this public engagement as “episodic” or “occasional” (11-12). While these terms seem to suggest ephemerality, the need for an activist public, and the motivation for creating such a public, is implicitly based on the idea that there is a problem (or “occasion”) that the public can help to solve. In practice, many social problems change over lengthy periods of time; still, the public is occasional or episodic in that it depends on a particular set of circumstances driving the formation and work of its members.

Other scholars argue that we need to reformulate our ideas of how publics are formed and how members of these publics interact. danah boyd contends that networked technologies transform the structure and interactions of publics through their architecture. Specifically, she looks at the ways in which many social network sites share common features that offer opportunities for self-representation, connection with others, and public communication. These three features correspond in important ways to UWAW’s purpose, and are important components of rhetoric in the forum. boyd also examines important dynamics that affect participation in networked publics. Communication is often created for “invisible audiences,” meaning that some parts of a communicator’s audience may not be visible or co-present, leading many participants to rely on an imagined audience as they compose. Collapsed contexts mean that previously separate social contexts, such as professional and personal acquaintances, are often merged in settings such as social networking sites. Finally, the affordances of digital media—such as the mobility that allows one to post a message for a large audience from a private space, or the

storage and replicability that allow private or semi-private messages to reach much wider audiences than those for whom they were intended—result in changing notions of public and private and changing senses of control over these contexts. In short, networked publics are partially shaped by the blurring of public and private boundaries.

These three phenomena—invisible audiences, collapsed contexts, and blurred public and private boundaries—complicate the everyday rhetorical situations encountered when participants interact through digital media. boyd notes that participants negotiate their communication strategies to work with these complex contexts, but that these dynamics amount to pervasive changes in everyday practice and a transformation of publics that affects public participation online and off (14–15). Indeed, recent shifts in scholars’ conceptualization of public discourse (toward multiple, heterogeneous activities) indicates that, whatever its origin, our understanding of publics is indeed transforming. Through my analysis of the Uprising of Women in the Arab World’s photo campaign, I hope to show that attending to the strategies of interruption that participants use in order to negotiate complex rhetorical situations—such as those encountered through digital activist campaigns—may offer new insights into public activity more broadly.

Two important aspects of UWAW participants’ interruptive work are its connection to the everyday and its public character. In addition to boyd’s connection of networked publics to changing everyday practices, scholars of digital activism also connect activist work to everyday practice. Leah Lievrouw, in her book, *Alternative and Activist New Media*, connects New Social Movement theory to digital activism, noting that these forms of activism “are deeply enmeshed and acted out in the everyday lives of movement participants” (53). Debates about terms such as “clicktivism,” “slacktivism,” and “armchair activism” draw attention to the increasing ways in which activists are developing methods of engagement that are a part of participants’ everyday

lives (cf. Karpf; Morozov; White). Communication through social media is an especially important form of this everyday activist practice, as it becomes an increasingly widespread and routine part of many individuals' daily lives, yet offers a range of opportunities for meaningful public activity.

The Uprising of Women in the Arab World focuses on intervening in existing public and everyday discourses in order to insert marginalized perspectives: the perspectives of Arab women. In this sense, the movement engages in what Nedra Reynolds refers to as “interruption.” Characterizing interruption as a feminist tactic, Reynolds emphasizes the agency involved in interruption, noting that interruption allows rhetors to intervene in everyday discourses and to assert agency in conversations (898). Likewise, Lievrouw characterizes digital activists' work as “explicitly *interventionist*. Their creators seek to interrupt or alter existing conditions, to subvert common-sense or taken-for-granted meanings and situations, to ‘introduce noise into the signal’” (Lievrouw 68).

This notion of interruption as both a call to attention and an intervention in the everyday is important for UWAW. Through the tactic of interruption, the Uprising of Women in the Arab World draws attention to the experiences of women in various MENA countries, while negotiating a space for women to speak. As Reynolds explains, “Through interruption and talking back, women rhetors can draw attention to their identities as marginalized speakers and writers as they also force more attention to the ideological workings of discursive exclusion” (Reynolds 898).

Zeynep Tufekci notes the importance of attention for online social movements: “gaining, denying, sustaining, and manipulating public attention is a key concern for all formal, semiformal, and informal movements with a stake in challenging or defending structures of

power and authority” (Tufekci 849). Tufekci notes that the difference between “slacktivist” campaigns and successful uses of social media and other internet-based tactics lies in the relationship between users’ attention to the movement/issue and the goals/outcomes of the movement. Through interruption, the Uprising of Women in the Arab World works to draw such attention, in order to “open up” the discourses of revolution and political change to include women’s hopes for their countries’ political and social futures. The following quote from UWAW’s self-description is a particularly apt characterization of the movement’s interruptive work:

[T]he Arab revolts are led in the name of dignity, justice and freedom, but we cannot reach for those values if women are being ignored or absented from the main scenery . . . We, women and men together, must continue revolting against oppression and put forward our feminist demands. (“Why This Intifada”)

UWAW participants engage in the public, activist work of interruption in order to draw and maintain attention to the importance of women’s rights, particularly through strategic use of everyday communication tools.

Digital Media, Activism, and the Arab Spring

Recent public and academic discourse has explored the ways social media and other digital technologies play a role in political discourse and social activism (Burgess, Foth, and Kloebe; Gillespie; Newsom and Lengel; Tufekci). The Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 are a compelling recent example of events that drew international and public attention to the relationship between rhetorical practices, digital media, and activism (cf. Bruns, Highfield, and Burgess; Newsom and Lengel; Tufekci and Wilson; Papacharissi and Oliveira). In addition to discourse about specific events and the processes of political change in countries such as Tunisia,

Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen, both scholarly and popular discourse explored the relationship between social media and the Arab Spring, often celebrating the role of social media in the Arab Spring uprisings. In particular, much of this popular discourse credits technology itself for activists' successes, describing platforms like Twitter as "revolutionary." Instead of this technologically-deterministic perspective, many scholars of new media are careful to point out the more complex, nuanced role of digital communication within activist contexts. While people, and not technologies, are the ones taking action, social media may indeed have provided important platforms for *helping* – to mobilize activists, publicize their causes, and relay news or other messages to various interested publics.

For example, several scholars have asked questions about who used Twitter during the Arab Spring uprisings and for what purposes. Lotan et al. examine the use of Twitter as a platform for producing and sharing news during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. The authors conclude by noting that news emerges from a "hybrid and dynamic information network" and features of Twitter support the ways in which "journalism, in this era of social media, has become a conversation" (1400). Bruns, Highfield, and Burgess track the use of the hashtags #egypt and #libya to examine participation patterns among Twitter users communicating in English, Arabic, or a mix of languages. Their analysis shows a difference in participation patterns between the two countries: while conversation about #egypt came from those involved as well as "onlookers" (i.e., outsiders in the international community), the Twitter conversation around #libya was largely driven by onlookers (Bruns, Highfield, and Burgess 894-895). In addition, their comparison of the English-language and Arabic-language tweets about #egypt shows a decline in English-language participants over time, suggesting that Arabic-language tweets may correspond to participation among individuals in or from the region who

are more invested in the process of long-term political change (Bruns, Highfield, and Burgess 881). These large-scale studies of social media activity offer important perspectives on the ways social media can be used to share information and facilitate conversation among participants, while also attending to important factors, such as language, location, and time, that affect social media use among activists, journalists, and their corresponding publics.

This conversation about the relationship between digital communication and activism was certainly going on before the uprisings, and has continued after some of the popular attention subsided. However, this moment of increased attention to the relationship between social media and political mobilization is an important contextual factor in considering the formation and activities of the Uprising of Women in the Arab World. In this chapter, I study a photo campaign that works to “interrupt” dominant discourses, using social networking to intervene in public and everyday discourses. By calling attention to everyday practices, such as typical conversations or ways of using language, participants interrupt taken-for-granted ways of speaking, thinking, and acting in order to call attention to dominant attitudes about women and push participants to question the status quo and push for change.

Next, I offer an overview of the Uprising of Women in the Arab World. First, I provide a brief contextualization of UWAW based on categories in James Porter’s forum analysis heuristic: background, audience, speakers and writers, and topics. Then, I analyze UWAW’s interruptive work by looking at the strategies and tools UWAW uses to engage participants in public activity through a photo campaign.

Forum Analysis of the Uprising of Women in the Arab World

Background and Purpose

The Uprising of Women in the Arab World's purpose is to call attention to, and encourage dialogue about, the conditions and rights of women in the Arab world. The transnational character of the Arab Spring is another important contextual factor in discussing UWAW. UWAW's participants engage in dialogue across national boundaries, and the four founders—Yalda Younes, Diala Haidar, Sally Zohney, and Farah Barqawi—are from three different countries: Younes and Haidar are from Lebanon, Zohney is from Egypt, and Barqawi is from Palestine (O'Neill). Even the notion of the "Arab Spring" is itself a transnational framing, drawing connections among citizens of multiple nations in the Middle East and North Africa. In interviews with the press, UWAW's founders have cited the importance of the Arab Spring for connecting citizens of various Arab nations to one another. As Yalda Younes explains,

there is an element which is the most incredible and precious thing about the Arab Spring: it has succeeded in creating a communion between the citizens of Arab countries, which their leaders have always failed to do . . . something unprecedented had happened between the people: we were each following each country's revolution as if it was our own country . . . so this phenomenon inspired us to create this page and inspired its title: to lead a common fight for women's rights in all Arab countries, independently of our cultural differences and our political regimes. (Samti)

Importantly, this is a solidarity among individuals, rather than nations. Again, Younes notes that "the most incredible thing about the Arab Spring is not only the fall of the dictators but it's this global solidarity created between the citizens, which doesn't exist at all at a state level. The governments never support each other — the Arab League is a joke" (Stoughton). Thus, this movement exceeds the boundaries of the nation-state, while also drawing attention to the digital platforms and vernacular publics through which this transnational activity is taking place.

The expressed purpose of the Uprising of Women in the Arab World is to (1) share the forms of discrimination faced by women in Arab countries, (2) identify shared struggles in order to create a common ground for activism, (3) encourage debate on the situation of women in Arab countries, including the experiences of women after the revolts and uprisings (“Why This Intifada”). I return to these three purposes at the end of this chapter, in order to show how their photo campaign works toward these purposes. UWAW also lists five demands toward which this forum and its members are working; these demands foreground the political stance of the founders and forum members, along with some of the topics valued in the forum:

1. Absolute freedom of thought, of expression, of belief or disbelief, of movement, of body, of clothing, of lodging, of decision making, of marriage or non-marriage
2. The right to autonomy, to education, to work, to divorce, to inheritance, to vote, to eligibility, to administrate, to ownership and to full citizenship
3. Familial, social, political and economic absolute equality with men
4. The abolition of all laws, practices and fatwas violating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as excision, stoning, lashing, the laws acquitting rapists or tolerating crimes of “honor”
5. Protection against domestic violence, sexual harassment and all forms of physical and psychological abuse and discrimination facing women today in the Arab world and beyond. (“Why This Intifada”)

Audience

As of August 2013, the Uprising of Women in the Arab World’s Facebook page had 115,185 likes, and their Twitter account had 6,018 followers. UWAW’s primary audience seems to be (Arabic-speaking) women in Middle-Eastern and North-African countries. More posts are

written in Arabic than in English; women are often addressed directly, and the topics considered, as well as the goals toward which the forum rhetoric strives, focus most often on the lives of women in the MENA region. The audience is assumed to have basic written and technological literacy, as well as a basic understanding of the political and social conditions of Middle Eastern and/or North African countries. The “about” sections of the webpage read as a text from women in the Arab world to others in the region:

The revolutions that made our heart pound and filled us with hope for each and every Arab country while getting rid of dictatorships must continue. We must now get rid of patriarchy that authorizes each man to be a dictator, whether with his sister, girlfriend, wife, daughter, or even his own mother.... We, women and men together, must continue revolting against oppression and put forward our feminist demands. (Uprising of Women in the Arab World, "Why This Intifada")

The “we” assumes that other women are addressed, but the demands made imply that the audience extends beyond women. For example, the fourth demand listed, “the abolishment of all laws, practices and fatwas violating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as excision, stoning, lashing, the laws acquitting rapists or tolerating crimes of ‘honor,’” requires political action, and therefore indicates that the audience includes more than just women in the region, perhaps even men and political leaders in particular (Uprising of Women in the Arab World). The fifth demand broadens the scope even further: “Protection against domestic violence, sexual harassment and all forms of physical and psychological abuse and discrimination facing women today in the Arab world and beyond” (Uprising of Women in the Arab World, “Why This Intifada”). The final phrase of this demand seems to indicate the potential for connection with women outside the region, toward common goals.

Based on comments and submissions, readership includes women in Arab countries or their diasporas, men from the region, as well as other individuals interested in women's rights or the Middle East/North Africa region. For example, one photo from my sample is posted by a couple in Australia; their names are Angela and William, and their message reads, "We are with the uprising because we believe that every soul is born EQUAL" (Angela & William from Australia). While members of the public don't have a way to know for certain that this couple isn't part of a diaspora, their names, location, and message do not indicate any ties to the region.

Conversely, another couple indicates their ties to the Arab world in several ways: Meray and Sven separate their names in order to indicate that they are from different places: "Meray from Syria and Sven from Germany"



FIGURE 4.1: MERAY AND SVEN.

rather than "Meray and Sven from ____". Additionally, their message indicates that their child will have an Arabic background, further solidifying their ties to the region. Sven wears a shirt with Arabic script in the image and is pictured with his arm around Meray; this body language and message about their future child indicate Meray and Sven's closeness as a couple, which

helps to tie Sven to the movement. Their message, photo, names and national affiliation work together to develop a complex, transnational picture of Arab identity and the importance of the UWAW beyond the MENA region.

Other submissions indicate the presence of audience members who may not have ties to the Arab world at all, but who declare support or solidarity with participants from Middle Eastern and North African countries. For example, a photo from Jack, in Canada, says, “I am for the Uprising of Women in the Arab World because human rights are for women too! Solidarity!” (Angela & William from Australia; Jack from Canada). In the comments on Jack’s photo, Cathy G. comments that “Women the world over deserve equal rights, equal pay, equal education, equal healthcare, etc. I stand with women around the world!!!! Keep up your fight for your rights!!!! There are plenty of us around the world that support your efforts!!!!” (Jack from Canada). Jack’s declaration of solidarity connects him to the movement in interest or goals, since his name, location, and appearance may not otherwise have identified him to others as a member of UWAW’s public. Commenters like Cathy, who declare their support as outsiders, are further evidence of this portion of UWAW’s public. Women also express solidarity through photo submissions. A photo by Clélia from France says, “I am with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World because no society may change in a good way excluding 50% of its population. Solidarity with women in the Arab world and everywhere in the world!!!!” (Clélia from France).

The audience is also assumed to be people who care about women, as well as the Arab world and its social and political future. The page certainly caters toward a more liberal audience but does not assume all audience members will share the same beliefs and attitudes toward the various issues that come up. While the primary audience has ties to the Arab world, the audience as a whole includes members from many nations and backgrounds. For the most part, members

of the forum are assumed to have some knowledge of important people and events related to the Arab Spring (including those made public via the web, such as the “Blue Bra Girl”¹⁵). Some knowledge of the political situation in various countries, or of current events (both those covered by the news media and those most prominently affecting women) is often assumed, as well.

Speakers and Writers

Participants are addressed daily through Facebook posts and Twitter updates about current events in the Arab world, especially news stories in which women or women’s rights are central. UWAW’s social media pages also share videos, photos, cartoons and other material regularly. Blog posts occur irregularly, depending on submissions from readers and relevant events or campaigns. On the website, the stable content (such as the “About” sections) and calls for user submissions are not attributed to a particular author; this content is most likely written by the group’s founders. Similarly, daily posts to Facebook and Twitter do not name specific authors, but are attributed to the group itself.

The two major online campaigns initiated by UWAW, a blogging campaign and a photo campaign, have called for specific kinds of user-submitted content. Both campaigns ask for users to share individual opinions or experiences, and to use the phrase “I am with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World.” As with many online forums, audience members do not get a consistent amount of background information on the individuals who speak, but the impression

¹⁵ The “Blue-Bra Girl” (also referred to as “The woman in the blue bra” and “the girl in the blue bra”) refers to a female protester in Cairo who was beaten by Egyptian military forces in December of 2011. Military police beat and kicked the woman, pulled her clothing over her head, and dragged her down the street. Photos and video of the incident circulated the internet through news outlets, blogs, and social media. Many viewers were particularly struck by the military police pulling the woman’s abaya (a long cloak or dress) over her head, revealing a bright blue bra underneath. According to most news accounts, the woman in the blue bra was too ashamed to reveal her name to the press. Media coverage (both news and social) drew attention to her as a symbolic figure, and activists protested the incident via physical demonstrations, news media, and multimodal rhetoric (both online and off – circulation of images and text, graffiti, etc.).

(via names, pictures, hints in what they write) given is that a wide range of people speak and write in the forum. Most speakers are female, but there are male speakers.

Topics

UWAW's website, Facebook, and Twitter pages include a wide range of genres. User-submitted material includes photographs, narratives, artwork, poetry, nonfiction, and more. The "Tell Your Story" campaign specifically emphasizes openness to multiple forms, and actual submissions do vary in length, form, and style. Posts by the movement's organizers include relevant news articles, video clips, cartoons, and web graphics¹⁶.

Topics in the forum cover a range of issues related to women in the Arab world, and sometimes the diaspora as well. These include: women and girls' experiences with home and family life, women's participation (or lack thereof) in politics, women's experiences in public spaces (including harassment on the street, and assault and rape of protesters such as those that occurred in Tahrir Square), religious and state laws regarding women (including the relationship between the two). Personal experience is the most commonly-cited form of evidence in the forum, and members accept it as valid, though at times individuals make a point of noting that what is true for one person may not be true for another. Perhaps most importantly, it is assumed that members of the forum have a basic understanding of some of the challenges faced by women in Arab countries. The experiences of Arab women, whether given firsthand or cited because they have been publicized elsewhere, are the most important sources cited in the forum. However, current events (and media coverage of them) and public figures are also cited in discussions of politics. Religious knowledge is occasionally cited, as well. For example, in one photo campaign submission, Ragheed from Syria states, "I am with the Uprising of Women in

¹⁶ I use this phrase to refer to images with text added to them via a drawing or photo-editing program.

the Arab World because the religion and society have deprived the women of freedom and given them to me” (Ragheed from Syria). The comment section includes a lengthy debate about the role of religion in the oppression of women. The debate centers mostly around Islam, including specific references to the Qur’an (mostly quoted by participants in the discussion) and what the Qur’an says about women (Ragheed from Syria). Elsewhere, when debates over Islam occur, religious knowledge is cited to support or contest a point being made. The most frequent form of documentation for all knowledge types is an informal citation, such as the name of a person quoted. Participants also document sources by linking to information elsewhere on the web.

Occasionally, specialized language is used to discuss topics in the forum, including references to government entities (e.g., SCAF, the Muslim Brotherhood), hadiths, or sections of the Qur’an. Colloquial Arabic, because it differs by region, might also be considered specialized language in some cases. If material is too specialized, sometimes other commenters will ask for explanation. In many cases, community members are very helpful in providing translations, correcting mistakes, and explaining specialized content to one another. For example, in a post by Hala from Saudi Arabia, her sign, written in Arabic, reads, “I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world because I am a woman and not a ‘hurma’” (Hala from Saudi Arabia). The third comment on the photo, by Marie-Christine H., “hurma, not ‘herem’!”, is “liked” by the UWAW page admins, and presumably indicates a correction to the initial translation of the word “hurma,” distinguishing it from a different Arabic word. Further down in the comments, Lindi O. writes, “Hurma means?” A fellow audience member, Liza Z., says, “Hurma is an offensive term to indicate that a woman is less than a man, and that she is not allowed to make any decision without consulting her male guardian first . . .” On other photos, audience members ask for signs in Arabic to be translated into English, if the caption does not provide a translation.

Sample Selection and Methodology

In choosing a sample of UWAW's rhetoric to analyze in more detail, I considered both the overall rhetorical context of the movement and the practical elements involved in completing this work for my dissertation. Although the movement grew to include offline protests as a part of their activist work, the Uprising of Women in the Arab World began online. For this reason, and because of the overall focus of my dissertation on digital communication, I wanted to choose an online campaign. At the time I made this selection, there were two online campaigns to choose from: a blogging campaign and a photo campaign. The photo campaign was the first campaign initiated by UWAW. It received over ten times the number of submissions as the blogging campaign (over 1000 photos in the photo campaign versus seventy/eighty in the blogging campaign) and garnered a great deal of publicity for UWAW. As I note below, some submissions from the photo campaign were also used in a later offline campaign. These factors indicated the significance of the photo campaign for UWAW, which led to my decision to focus on photo submissions.

One additional factor that is important to consider in this chapter is that the campaign uses the language "Arab world" to describe a large and diverse region, with nations and cultures that vary quite widely. Although I do not have the ability to gauge the representation of all participants in UWAW (including those who comment on posts, or who simply read material and do not "like" or respond), I did tally the countries represented in the sample of photo submissions I analyzed. As the table below shows, the countries represented do not include all of the countries that might be considered a part of the Arab world, nor are the countries which are represented included in equal proportions. Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon are the countries with which most photo submitters identify themselves. These numbers could relate to a number

of factors, including the representation of women from those countries on social media, cultural practices around photographing women, as well as the social networks (on and offline) of the four founders of UWAW.

TABLE 3: WHICH PARTS OF THE "ARAB WORLD" ARE REPRESENTED IN UWAW'S PHOTO SUBMISSIONS?

Country (as identified in the photo caption)	Number of photos
Algeria	3
Australia	1
Canada	1
Egypt	22
France	1
Germany	1
Italy	2
Jordan	4
Lebanon	13
Morocco	5
Palestine	18
Puerto Rico	1
Saudi Arabia	2
Sudan	2
Syria	15
Tunisia	6
United Arab Emirates (Dubai)	1
Yemen	4

UWAW's Photo Campaign

In the rest of this chapter, I focus specifically on examples from UWAW's photo campaign. First, though, I offer a brief introduction to the different campaigns UWAW has initiated, in order to contextualize the photo campaign as one part of a larger set of rhetorical work undertaken by organizers and participants. These campaigns work together to perform different social functions for individual participants and the community as a whole.

Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd, in their analysis of the weblog as a social genre, identify weblogs as a forum for “self-expression and community development,” noting the ways in which bloggers’ rhetorical activity is a way of constructing a self and building connections to others online. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter perform similar functions: individuals create, share, and comment on material, and this activity is tied to an identity, allowing social media users to “cultivate the self in a public way” (Miller and Shepherd). The Uprising of Women in the Arab World builds a public community by asking participants to engage in this public self-construction by identifying themselves with the movement and with one another. This rhetorical tactic is clear from the first two campaigns initiated by UWAW, a blogging campaign and a photo campaign.

The “Tell Your Story” blogging campaign accepts submissions, which are then posted to the website. Similarly, the photo campaign (“I am with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World because...”) accepts submissions, which are shared by the campaign on their website, Flickr, and other social media pages. “Tell Your Story” submissions specifically ask for contributions from women in the Arab world, especially those stories that highlight experiences of discrimination or abuse:

Because almost each one of us has endured a form of physical, psychological or sexual violence, just for being a woman: an arbitrary deprivation of liberty, or a sexual harassment (at home, at school, at work, in the streets...), rape (including marital rape), female genital mutilation, forced marriage (including marriage of minors), crimes in the name of “honor”... Write your story, ending it with the words/sentence: ”This is why I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world.” (Uprising of Women in the Arab World, “Tell Your Story Campaign Call”)

Visitors to the website are able to post comments to blog entries, including the “Tell Your Story” campaign entries. On Facebook, those who follow UWAW’s page can post comments in reply to the stories, and Twitter users can reply to UWAW tweets. All website and social media content can also be shared and commented upon beyond the context of UWAW’s pages and posts. Most activity among participants (e.g., outside of posts mediated by the official UWAW accounts) occurs through Facebook likes and comments. For many social media users, Facebook likes and comments are a part of their everyday communication repertoire. These activities, then, are an example of the ways in which UWAW engages participants in activism as a part of their everyday practice.

The photo campaign, “I am with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World,” posts contributions from a wide range of individuals: both women and men, either within or outside the Arab world, who have submitted a photo expressing a message of support for the campaign. The standard format for these photos is a shot of an individual, holding a sign, facing the camera. The sign begins, “I am with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World because,” and ends with a unique reason from that person or group. Photos are shared across digital platforms, via links between the website, Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter. Social media followers of UWAW engage in dialogue through comments on the photos. In fact, comments on the photos often include debate over the ideas expressed in the photos. While the comments are not a part of my sample, and thus are not discussed in detail here, I did view comments on many photos as a part of my forum analysis research. Comments range from messages of support to heated debates over cultural or religious traditions and beliefs. These debates show that the photos and campaign messages are reaching an audience beyond forum members who agree with UWAW’s message.

While internet and social media campaigns have been a key focus of the group, UWAW has also initiated two offline events of its own, in addition to calling attention to the work of other women's rights activists in the Arab region. The first of the offline events, "Global Protest Against Sexual Terrorism Practiced on Egyptian Female Protesters," called on supporters to protest outside the Egyptian embassies in their city. Twenty-five cities held local events on the date of the protest, February 12, 2013, in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America. The second event took place on March 8, 2013, International Women's Day, and drew on submissions to the earlier photo campaign. Giant banners featuring photos from the campaign were hung on public buildings in eight cities in different Arab countries: Sana'a, Yemen; Beirut, Lebanon; Cairo, Egypt; Tunis, Tunisia; Benghazi, Libya; Tangier, Morocco; Ramallah, Palestine; and Amman, Jordan.

In order to examine the interruptive rhetoric of the Uprising of Women in the Arab World more closely, I will now turn my analysis to a set of examples from UWAW's public photo campaign. The photo campaign, as mentioned above, was important for increasing membership and publicity for UWAW. Most of the photos are translated into both Arabic and English, and thus these photos reach a wide swath of UWAW's participants and audience members. From the 1,039 photos, I selected a sample of every tenth photo, so that my sample consists of 103 photos. The full set of photos submitted to the campaign is available on Facebook, in two albums, each titled, in Arabic, "I am with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World because." Facebook limits albums to a thousand photos, so the initial album used for the campaign contains one thousand photos, and a second album contains thirty-nine additional submissions. Photos in the album are organized in reverse chronological order (with the most recent submissions first, presumably in the order they were received by the campaign organizers). The standard format for

these photos is a shot of an individual, holding a sign, facing the camera. The sign begins, “I am with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World because,” and ends with a unique reason from that person or group, such as “I’m with the uprising of women in the Arab world, because in 2013, we Arabs still need to justify why Arab women have to uprising!” (Hajar from Morocco/Dubai). This rhetorical move is effective in highlighting the diversity of participants, while also creating a sense that participants are united as a collective for this struggle.

These photos are typically a single person and the sign is usually written in Arabic, but many variations exist in other languages, with small groups, and other variations on the theme. Even among the campaign submissions, creative twists on the theme work to interrupt the discourse of UWAW and its participants in ways that call attention to the diversity of experience and opinion among participants. The creativity shown by participants speaks to Burgess, Foth, and Klæbe’s discussion of the ways in which vernacular creative practices can facilitate public engagement.

The “typical” photo includes a woman holding a piece of white paper on which she has written in black ink. Variations on this basic form range from simple to complex: writing in one or multiple colors, with different sizes and emphasis placed on different words; photos including couples or groups, men and children, or even objects (e.g., one young man poses with a skeleton and includes anatomical images to draw attention to the minimal differences between men and women); messages written on multiple or unconventional surfaces (e.g., writing on a surface other than a single piece of white paper, such as a markerboard or electronic device); creative poses (such as a yoga instructor from Saudi Arabia who poses upside down with the caption and refers to conditions being “turned upside down”). Some participants merge multiple creative strategies (e.g., a diptych of a couple who have each posed individually with their back to the

camera, holding the same sign over their shoulder). Many participants hold the paper over their face, so that only their eyes are visible; some other participants wear masks, sunglasses, and hats, or craft deliberate poses in order to obscure all or part of their faces. Through their organization on the site and adherence to constraints of the campaign theme, the submissions are drawn together as a collective body of work.

Through the photo campaign, individual participants in the movement engage in a variety of rhetorical moves. The movement organizers also make important rhetorical choices in their organization and framing of materials. Nearly every post is titled with the participant's name and a national or geographic affiliation, such as "Asmaa from Tunisia," "Omar from Egypt," and "Batoul from Syria." Through this system of national affiliation, the transnational character of the movement is highlighted in different ways. First, and most obviously, the range of individuals and places represented is highlighted, as individuals who view several pictures see multiple names, places, and faces. This highlights the ways in which UWAW works to connect individuals throughout the Arab world and across the globe. The designation "from" can have multiple meanings: the individual's country of birth, the country an individual currently resides in, or the country considered "home" by that person. The choice to simplify individuals' national affiliation this way could, in some cases, gloss over the complexity of national affiliations for many in the region.

Although the majority of posts stick to the simple format, numerous posts do deviate from the script, which actually draws readers' attention to the nuances of citizenship and national affiliation for many individuals "from" countries in the Arab world by interrupting the conventions of this genre. For example, a photo by Maram is captioned "Maram from Jerusalem, Palestine. Exiled in USA (banned from the right to return)" (Maram). Unlike many of the

participants, who are photographed in the location they are “from,” Maram’s photo is amended to show the complexity of even claiming a national affiliation—she is from Jerusalem, *Palestine*—and through her articulation, participants are reminded of her nation’s struggle for existence. Her state of exile further complicates the simple notion of being “from” a particular place, drawing attention to the ways Arab women’s citizenship is not necessarily simple or straightforward. Deviating from the standard, simple “X from Y” format highlights the politics of Maram’s situation and her relationship to both her own nationality and her fellow Arab women. Maram’s individual reasons for supporting the movement are interspersed with references to her complicated national identification: “I’m with the uprising of the Arab women because as an American-Palestinian my freedom & rights are worth nothing to me if my Arab sisters in the Middle-East can’t live freely as I do” (Maram). Several other participants also note the complexity of Palestinian national affiliation through the use of the term “occupied”: “Tarek from occupied Jerusalem, Palestine,” “Amran from occupied Golan Heights” (Tarek; Amran). Other participants deviate from the form more simplistically, such as posts attributed to “Nahla from Algeria and lives in Cairo,” “Egyptian Director Nadine Khan,” or “a Syrian bride.”

For those who stick to the standard form, not unpacking the “from” designation can work to interrupt the discourse of the campaign. Using the common “X from Y” format occasionally raises comment from other participants, as seen in a photo of “Yasmina from Algeria”: Yasmina is pictured holding a protest sign in a metro car, and commenters discuss her location (Germany) by referring to evidence from the picture and knowledge of the places referenced:

Marianne W¹⁷: she's in Germany, in Berlin specifically

¹⁷ The last names of commenters have been shortened to the first initial. Additionally, text from Facebook is presented exactly as it was written. The conventions of many online writing contexts, including social media comments, do not require strict adherence to the conventions for spelling, capitalization, and punctuation typical of

Kouichi S: Yeah was about to say I didn't know Algeria had a Metro system and I am sure there are no protests there.

Sarah M: There is a metro system in Algeria (Algiers) and even a Tramway.. but no protests

Sarah M: .. for now

Faiyza F: It doesn't mean that she's not from Algeria...

Nesrine S B: Lovely! Proud of her! Yes there is a Metro system and tramway in Algeria but this picture is in Germany!

Dome N: ...as can be easily seen from the little pictures of the "Brandenburger Tor" on the metro windows... Berlin!

In addition to this dialogue referring to the specific places referenced by the photo, commenters add messages of support: “Bravo!” “Proud Of you yasmina;) Go ahead...” and “Well done ☺ bent bladi.” In the last of these examples, “bent bladi” refers to Yasmina in Arabic as “girl of my country” to mean “my fellow (female) Algerian,” thus using nationality and gender in order to establish solidarity and extend support.

Layers of Interruption

The Uprising of Women in the Arab World fosters multiple layers of interruption among participants. The most general sense in which UWAW performs interruption is through women’s participation and visibility in fighting for their rights. While women activists have always been present in the Arab world, the number and visibility of women activists have increased. Sahar Khamis notes that “the mere fact that women in some of the most conservative Arab societies . . .


academic writing. Therefore, in order to maintain readability and respect for the conversation participants’ writing practices, I have chosen to carefully reproduce the text as it appears without marking errors (i.e., without adding the “sic” notation after each nonstandard occurrence).

have rallied in large numbers for many months under threatening and dangerous conditions signals a new era in the history of feminism in this region” (Khamis 694). The campaign itself is framed as an interruption in the discourses of the Arab Spring. In the context of public attention to the political and ideological goals of the Arab Spring uprisings, UWAW intervenes in order to assert the centrality of women’s rights to freedom and justice for all people in the region, not just for women. Media coverage of UWAW adds to this process, using the perspective of the movement to complicate the dominant narratives of the Arab Spring.


In her characterization of interruption, Nedra Reynolds emphasizes that “agency is not simply about finding one’s own voice, but also about intervening in discourses of the everyday and cultivating rhetorical tactics that make interruption and resistance an important part of any conversation” (898). As participants in UWAW’s photo campaign call attention to the ways in which women are marginalized by social, cultural, political, legal, or religious practices, they also create rhetorics that can justify the interruptive work of the campaign, and share arguments that can be used toward discussions beyond this online context. Sometimes, this is as simple as sharing a phrase or sentence that will be useful in other contexts. Other times, this might be the presentation of a method of reasoning or a particular form of injustice that will inspire readers/viewers to think through a perspective more thoroughly.

As I note in the introduction to this chapter, digital activist work is often interwoven in participants’ everyday lives. Engaging in public discourse through social media often takes place alongside other everyday digital practices. A participant in the Uprising of Women in the Arab World might encounter photos from the campaign in her or his “news feed,” alongside the daily social updates from friends, family, coworkers, classmates, and other acquaintances. If the individual is actively engaged in many feminist and women’s rights groups, the interruption from

UWAW posts might not be jarring. For other participants, though, a reminder of UWAW's work alongside news and photos from friends and family might interrupt this everyday activity by turning attention toward the sexism and discrimination that women face in the Arab world. For participants outside the region, the photos might interrupt everyday understandings of women's experience, by reminding them of similarities or differences between their experiences as women and the experiences of the woman in the photo.

Most activity among participants (e.g., outside of posts mediated by the official UWAW accounts) occurs through Facebook likes and comments. For many social media users, Facebook likes and comments are a part of their everyday communication repertoire. These activities, then, are an example of Lievrouw's assertion that digital activist practices are a part of participants' everyday lives. Comments on the photos are often a place for support and community-building. Commenters respond with positive messages in various languages, including things like "with you," "well said," "I agree," or ".

¹⁸ Although brief, these comments are an important component of public communication on the site. danah boyd contends that "through mundane comments, participants are acknowledging one another in a public setting . . . Comments are not simply a dialogue between two interlocutors, but a performance of social connection before a broader audience" (6). This idea of public acknowledgement might reasonably be extended to Facebook's "like" feature, as well, which is the most common response to campaign photos. Most photos have several hundred "likes," and some have over one thousand. "Sharing" the photo (via Facebook's built-in sharing feature) is also a common response, though some people might share the photos and add commentary to express disagreement or disapproval. Comments are the least common response. For example, the first photo in my sample is "liked" 1,051 times,

¹⁸  is the icon Facebook uses to display a heart; it can be created several ways, such as by typing the characters "<3" or inserting a Unicode symbol for a black heart (U+2665, or Alt + 3 on a PC).

shared¹⁹ 161 times, and commented on 28 times; the last photo in the sample is “liked” 221 times, shared 20 times, and commented on 15 times (Hajar from Morocco/Dubai; Lubna from Morocco).

Many posts relate women’s freedom and political rights to the larger situation of the Arab world, or even humanity. Twenty-one photos, or 20% of the sample, used this tactic. These posts call attention to the status quo in which UAWAW intervenes. Amira from Tunisia says, “I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world, because without Free Women the Arab world will NEVER see the light” (Amira from Tunisia). Hazem from Syria forges connections among prominent issues in multiple countries:

“So
in Syria they marry her aged 15
in Yemen they strip her of her nationality
in Tunisia they rape her and they accuse her of being guilty
in Morocco they marry her to her rapist
and in Saudi Arabia she doesn't drive a car
and wherever she goes and comes her rights are totally crushed
AND YOU WANT HER NOT TO REVOLT,
idiots?!” (Hazem from Syria)

Bassem from Lebanon says, “I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world because our delay from achieving complete equality between men and women is the same as our distance from achieving a human, real and actual society” (Bassem from Lebanon). Dellair from Jordan

¹⁹ “like” and “share” here refer to options on a Facebook post to click a link and “like” or “share” within Facebook (likes are counted and listed using the Facebook user’s name, and shares can occur on a user’s own page or on the page of someone else (usually a friend); this does not account for other places it might be shared as a link and not counted, including sharing it through Facebook’s chat/message system, which does not affect the share count.)

says, “I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world and everywhere... because the moment men ruled the world, they ruined it” (Dellair from Syria). Posts using this tactic establish solidarity and connection among individuals by articulating a shared experience of how things are, and, in some cases, a shared hope for what the future might be. Establishing connections among participants might be seen as a way to lend weight to the rhetorical interruption in which the group engages. Not only does a significant group of participants help outsiders to the movement take notice, it may also give participants further confidence to assert their ideas.

One form of interruption used by many of the participants is to compare women’s situation or experiences to that of men. Out of the photos in my sample, 17% use this tactic. This move works to position women and men in relation to one another, a move that often implies similarity or common ground, but then interrupts this similarity by exposing differences or incongruities that marginalize women. For example, Nahla, from Algeria (and living in Cairo), says “I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world because she fought side by side with men and when we got our independence, we forbid her from going out in the street after 8 PM” (Nahla from Algeria and lives in Cairo). Ragheed also draws on this theme, pointing to his own gender in making the comparison, “I’m with the uprising of women in the Arab world because the religion and society have deprived the women of freedom and given them to me...” (Ragheed from Syria). Comparison of women’s and men’s experience is common among male participants in the sample; this strategy might be an important way for men to share their own experiences in a way that connects them with the goals of UWAW. Thirty-five out of the 103 photos in my sample, or 34%, include men; among photos that compare women’s and men’s experiences, 47% include men. Comparing men’s and women’s experiences can also be a way for women to interrupt everyday, taken-for-granted ways of seeing and experiencing the world in order to point

to the ways that women are unnecessarily marginalized. Alina and Nadia draw on this comparison between genders: “I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world because I am tired of hearing that sentence: ‘You are a girl, people talk about you, and he's a guy no one will say anything whatever he does’” (Alina and Nadia from Haifa, Palestine). Alina and Nadia position this line of dialogue as representative of typical, gendered ways of thinking and responding to others. In this context, they work to interrupt not just a single conversation, but a way of thinking.

Other posts call attention to meanings attributed to womanhood or ways of being a ‘good’ woman. Many participants who use this tactic pay particular attention to the language used in everyday interactions. This can include ways of referring to some or all women, as we saw above with Hala’s post about the word ‘hurma,’ and as Sarah also points out: “I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world because they call me a whore for enjoying sex!” (Sarah from Lebanon). Ghassan, a male participant from Lebanon, also highlights the meaning associated with “woman”: “I am with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World because if you want to humiliate and insult an Arab man, it's enough to call him a ‘woman’” (Ghassan from Lebanon).

Another form of interruption among the photo campaign samples is to emphasize that women are human beings. Dina from Egypt makes this point saliently, writing, “I am with the uprising of women in the Arab world because I want her to be treated like a human being and not like a female” (Dina from Egypt). Through this juxtaposition of “human being” and “female” as separate categories, Dina employs a strategy of pointing to a “universal” category, the human being, which is often invoked in rights discourses, while also hinting that this category is often used to protect or defend a certain type of human being. Through the tactic of pointing out the ways that females are both marginalized, and included in the category “human being,” Dina

interrupts conversations about rights discourses and about the roles and responsibilities of women to question each. What does it mean to be a human being, and what rights should human beings have? What rights do women have? Is there discrepancy between the experiences of a “human being” and a woman? The tactic of referring to women as human beings is also used to call attention to women as a significant proportion of the population: “It is the same womb that carried us and brought us here, that made us equal human beings, men and women, so that we share this gift of life. . . .” (Ghinwa from Lebanon)

Highlighting Agency Through Interruption

By making participants central to the movement and highlighting the agency of women, UWAW encourages participants to intervene in discourses that marginalize women, both within and beyond the public discourses of the group. As I note above, Reynolds characterizes interruption as both a call to attention and an intervention in everyday discourses. UWAW’s rhetoric positions participants as central to the movement, which highlights the importance of the individual agency of participants to the movement’s goals. In interviews, the founders have stressed that they want the contributions of community members to take center stage, and credit members and fans of the movement with its success (Samti, Tunisia-live.net). This focus on participants also aligns with Leah Lievrouw’s characterization of new media activism as focused on the agency and action of the individual people involved. UWAW participants have both a stake and a role in the movement, and UWAW campaigns highlight individual members in ways that assert their individuality and agency, while also connecting members to one another. As Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport note, one of the major benefits of the World Wide Web for online activists is “the opportunity to parlay small individual actions that are spread out across time and space into major collective, coordinated action” (11).

In order to balance the dual purposes of highlighting individual agency and fostering community/collaboration, UAWW's editorial policy stipulates that everyone is allowed to speak as long as their speech respects others' beliefs and rights:

This intifada is a free secular space for constructive dialogue and fearless listening about women's rights in the Arab world. It does not infringe on any religion or belief for any of the members. All members have the right and freedom to their beliefs as long as they are committed to the limits and do not try to impose his/her views on the others.

(“Who We Are”)

This tension between individual freedom and respect for others' rights comes up most often in discussions within Facebook comment threads. Questioning and disagreement among forum members are handled differently by different members, of course, and some of this depends on the context (perhaps including the tone of individuals involved and the distance between views). Some issues are debated through multiple comments; some comments are met with silence or harsh words. For example, a post on men and women cohabitating (without being married) sparks considerable debate among commenters, as does a photo of a woman who appears to be naked (the photo shows only her head and shoulders) (Dalia from Lebanon; Zeina from Lebanon). In the former post, by Dalia from Lebanon, some disagreements and negative responses lead members to reassert the ideals of individual freedom of expression, such as the following comments:

Nour H.: I don't agree with living with another man but I believe that every woman is free as long as she doesn't attack others freedom

Nadine F. N.: Ya 3ami why is hard for us to accept that we are different and let people do what they want to do!!! Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo one is going to force you

to live out of wedlock but this girl wants to, It is her right, her right, her right, her right, her right...am repeating because as we say in Arabi, Itokrar bi3alim le7mar “repetition even teaches the donkey”

Other commenters maintain their support for the movement, but clarify that this is not their vision of freedom, referring to the conflict between cohabitation and religious beliefs.

In addition to emphasizing participants rather than the movement’s founders, UWAW also highlight’s women’s voices and agency. UWAW’s slogan is “together for fearless, free, and independent women in the Arab world” (“Why This Intifada”). Middle-Eastern and North African women are the most important figures in this forum, and their experiences are highlighted most prominently. Women who were important figures in the Arab Spring uprisings, such as Samira Ibrahim, Tawakkul Karman, Fadwa Suleiman and Zainab Al-Khawaja, are considered inspirational figures, as are other women whose stories have been publicized and become emblematic of the struggle for women’s rights, such as Manal Al-Sharif and Amina El-Filali, or the “Blue Bra Girl” (Samti, Tunisia-live.net, Abbas OpenDemocracy.net). Yalda Younes, a founder of the movement, cites these women as inspiration for UWAW, and says, “We wanted to honor these women and to give them the place that they deserve, because they were not honored enough in the revolution” (Abbas, OpenDemocracy.net). In news interviews, the founders of UWAW explain that although women were full participants in the Arab Spring uprisings, women’s rights have been dismissed or de-prioritized as post-revolution governments are formed:

We were fed up by the eternal sentence: ‘now is not the time to talk about women’s rights; there are priorities.’ So by creating this page we refused to resign to defeat but instead decided to keep battling fearlessly for our FULL rights, without waiting for

anyone's authorization or for 'good timing,' with no (self) censorship and no compromise whatsoever. (Samti, Tunisia-live.net)

UWAW's founders and participants use interruption to both build community and to assert their agency in public and everyday discourses by highlighting the importance of individual participants and building connection among members.

New Forms of Interruption

As I note at the beginning of this chapter, the Uprising of Women in the Arab World, as a movement, functions to interrupt discourses about the Arab Spring, positioning women as central actors in the uprisings, and their rights as central to achieving the uprisings' political goals. In positioning participants as central to the movement, UWAW highlights women's sharing of opinions and experiences as important tactics for interrupting the dominant discourses about women in the Arab world.

UWAW continues to engage participants by creating new campaigns. For example, an offline campaign initiated by UWAW covered large buildings in major cities in the Arab world with banners that displayed photos from the campaign discussed here. This extension of the photo campaign helps us to conceptualize the ways in which UWAW and its rhetoric might perform interruption beyond what is available online. Altering the everyday surroundings of the city, especially in such a large-scale way, serves to interrupt the daily activities of those who live and work in that city. Additionally, individuals who are already inclined to participate in a movement called "The Uprising of Women in the Arab World," either by submitting, discussing, or even just reading the material posted online may be less surprised by some of the opinions and photos than everyday citizens who encounter the signs as banners on a building. Thus, this campaign may perform a different kind of interruption—one that extends the interruptive work

of the initial photo campaign. Another campaign, “Hal taalameen? (Do you know?),” involves a spreadable genre. Like each of the Pixel Project’s spreadable genres discussed in chapter 3, this genre is connected to a specific public, social action: educating public participants about laws that discriminate against women in Arab countries. The construction of spreadable material, framed with the question “Do you know?” indicates the purpose of this material to “interrupt” by pointing out women’s legal situation and offering material for engaging the public in discussion of these issues.

These campaigns offer new forms of interruption, while continuing to draw attention to UWAW and its goals. Zeynep Tufekci addresses the role of attention in online social movements, arguing that understanding attention as a resource can help us understand how the Internet affects public participation:

[R]ather than a slacktivist-activist distinction, which relies on a conceptualization of separate ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ worlds in a digital dualist framework (Jurgenson, 2012), one should study various strategies for acquiring attention and examine the tactical ability (or lack thereof) of social movements to link attention, a necessary but not sufficient resource, to movement outcomes—and as decades of research on the relationship between media and movements shows, this has always been complicated. (Tufekci 851)

Within the photo campaign, opportunities for creativity, mentioned above, and for participation to involve both constructing a self and building a community, are two methods for sustaining attention to the campaign among UWAW participants. New campaigns further extend attention to UWAW. Additionally, this attention is clearly linked to UWAW’s goals. Many comments on photo campaign submissions offer support and express shared experience or understanding, establishing common ground among participants.

As I mention in the introduction to this chapter, interruption does not necessarily accomplish all of the work that needs to be done. The photo campaign discussed in this chapter draws attention to UAW and to women. However, drawing attention to the problem may not necessarily solve it. The photo campaign successfully points out many experiences and conditions that are widely agreed upon as problematic, while also drawing attention to the divergence of viewpoints on more controversial elements of women's experiences and situations. In concluding her article on interruption, Nedra Reynolds calls on feminists in composition studies to "elaborate ways of tactically speaking in strategic loci" so that we can "situate interruption in a larger tactical rhetoric that emphasizes everyday acts of public discourse" (907). Amid public and academic anxiety over new forms of digital activist participation, in which concerns emerge around whether activists who engage in online campaigns are actually making a difference, it becomes ever more important to investigate different forms of participation, in order to determine how they work and what they might do for an activist campaign. Reynolds offers interruption as a way to engage this work, by calling on feminist compositionists:

to investigate the kinds of interruption possible in written texts and the reader-writer relationship. Such investigation might lead to a cultivation of postmodernism-inspired discourses that offer other forms of participating in intellectual and political discussions besides the formal essay or written Standard English . . . we need to rethink radically the forms of writing we find acceptable. The result might be the breakdown of some of the rigid boundaries that separate life and politics inside and outside the academy. (907)

I believe that Reynolds' call can be extended more broadly to our consideration of everyday discursive acts and how these acts can serve public and activist functions. For the Uprising of

Women in the Arab World, participation in a photo campaign is one way to interrupt the discourses of the Arab Spring, and to draw attention to women's rights, through social media.

Chapter 5 | Women's Agency and Digital Activist Practices

Prior to beginning my work on this dissertation, I knew that there were many connections to be made among the research and theory in public rhetoric, transnational feminism, and new media studies, but it wasn't until I engaged in the process of writing about each area, and trying to articulate the connections (connections I thought I had already made), that I realized the extent to which these areas of interdisciplinary overlap could produce fruitful new ways of seeing and thinking about the material under study. In the following sections, I attempt to connect some of the ideas I draw on in each chapter to the other case studies in this project.

Representation

Each of the groups studied in this project uses specific means of representing participants and where they are from, and uses strategies to tie participants together. Girl Up encourages participants to unite by focusing on their similarities (girlhood), whereas I believe that the other two projects focus more on uniting different types of people to a common cause. As my stance in the different chapters might suggest, this subtle difference in orientation is one that is important. For feminist campaigns, and especially campaigns with a global or transnational focus, it is important to represent a variety of voices in order to avoid marginalizing participants.

Through an analysis of Girl Up's representational practices in chapter 2, I explore the tension among activists between representing the collective goals of a movement and the multiple voices and publics who participate in the movement. Although Girl Up frames its work as "uniting" girls around the world, the representational imbalance and privileging of U.S. girls' experiences limits the extent to which this unity will be achieved. Of course, it is possible that Girl Up doesn't really want to unite girls. The optimist in me, however, believes that whether or not this is a conscious, overt goal behind the campaign, the rhetorical choices which speak of

bringing girls around the world together speak to a perception that this work is a positive goal, and one that would likely be beneficial for girls. If nothing else, a key goal for activists lies in building a critical mass, a public with which to share the problem at hand, and, hopefully, with enough voices and talents to make others hear the problem and to begin the work necessary to solving it. Girl Up is engaging in multiple strategies that work toward building a public with which to share information and work toward solutions. The campaign is well-publicized in the United States and has engaged many girls in activities related to the campaign. However, this should be only part of the process. If the goals of unity and change are truly central to the campaign, balanced representation and dialogue among the various groups of girls represented need to become a part of the campaign's work.

Representation is not just important to Girl Up's campaign. The Pixel Project describes itself as a global campaign, and its "30 for 30" Father's Day interviews do include fathers from a variety of places, but the participants from the US far outnumber participants from other countries. In positioning itself as a global campaign, it is important for the Pixel Project to consider which voices are represented through its campaign. Factors such as the campaign's language may also affect this. For Girl Up, representation of girls in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi often necessitates translation. If a campaign's materials are composed in one language, as the Pixel Project's materials are in English, this may affect who is represented; campaign organizers may want to ask whether the global representatives of a campaign are representative of a narrow range of socioeconomic statuses, for instance. Activist campaigns don't necessarily need to represent everyone's voices, but it's important to know whose voices are represented in order to evaluate the claims being made and the work being done by a particular campaign.

Representation is also an important question for the Uprising of Women in the Arab World's campaign. The campaign organizers' choice of "Arab world" as a descriptor may point to the campaign's goal of including women from throughout the region. However, the photos in my sample include many more women from Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria than from more conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia or Yemen. Many countries, such as Bahrain, Iraq, Qatar, Somalia, and Oman, are not represented. Thus, the representation of the "Arab world" in the photos is likely skewed toward the ideologies prevalent in the regions most represented.

Additionally, representation goes beyond simply who is present in the conversation. Girl Up privileges certain experiences through the language used to describe the different experiences of girls. The Pixel Project, too, may consider the ways in which its rhetoric represents men and women who experience violence. Even the representations of family through the "30 for 30" interviews may privilege certain types of families over others. The Uprising of Women in the Arab World might privilege certain visions of feminism or freedom (e.g., secular feminism). Through the language used to discuss these aspects of the campaign, participants (or potential participants) discover whether their experiences and ideologies are compatible with the campaign and its goals.

Spreadable Genres

Each of the groups in my project also uses spreadable genres to accomplish their work. Jenkins, Ford, and Green's concept of spreadable media is meant to indicate a broad pattern of cultural practices, and rhetorical genre theory is even more broadly applicable to communication practices, so this should not be surprising. However, the presence of spreadable genres in all three groups' work was exciting to discover.

My analysis of spreadable genres illustrates the ways that digital activist campaigns can combine the affordances of digital platforms with specific rhetorical choices in order to enable the spread of activist texts. As I wrote through the connections between spreadability, generic uptake, and the Pixel Project's public rhetoric in chapter 3, I noticed connections to the genres used in other chapters, as well. For example, the Girl Up videos I examine in chapter 2 are examples of spreadable genres, but not all of the videos seem intended to spread in the same ways. The genres, and the platforms through which they are shared, provide opportunities for spreading, but this does not necessarily mean that participants will spread the genre, or that the genres will spread similarly. Some videos offer overviews of Girl Up that are intended for a wide audience; spreading the video will bring Girl Up's purpose and message to many communities. Other videos focus more specifically on the individual work and thoughts of Girl Up teen advisors, and might work well as a way to spread conventions and ideas among Girl Up club participants by modeling participation in Girl Up. These videos bring up questions about what exactly spreads when a genre spreads, and how the spread of a genre might interact with the development of a community.

In chapter 4, the photo campaign I analyze is an example of a spreadable genre, and this genre also brings up questions about what can "spread" when a genre spreads. The conventions of the photo campaign as an activist genre have spread among different activist groups. This genre's conventions did not begin with the Uprising of Women in the Arab World. However, the repurposing of a set of generic conventions in ways that build a public and spark public discourse is a rhetorically savvy move, and one that speaks to the knowledge and hard work of UWAW's founders. The creativity shown in UWAW participants' photo submissions is a wonderful illustration of the ways in which generic constraint and choice offer *opportunities* to rhetors that

might encourage participation. A set of genre conventions that allow participants to easily take up the genre, but also provide room for creativity, may serve important functions for activist groups. For example, I propose that the photo campaign, as a genre, offers opportunities for individuals to publicly perform their identities as members of UWAW's public. The features of the genre, in which individuals are asked to begin with the same phrase and end with their own reason, offers a way for individuals to add to UWAW's discourse and spark conversation, while also maintaining a connection to the group and to other participants. In a future project, I would be interested in analyzing comments on the UWAW photos to see whether there are in-group and out-group responses to ideas that fit with my analysis of the rhetorical work of the genre. That is, if the genre functions to tie submissions together and identify participants as members of a group, do comments on the photos support this idea in their stance toward the person in the photo and the ideas presented? UWAW's photo campaign is a spreadable genre, yet there may be sacrifices that occur when a genre is intended to spread. In order to be appropriate for such activity, the genre is typically brief; this may inhibit discussion of the complexity of the issues engaged by the campaign. Additionally, certain opinions (such as those that are more widely agreed upon) may spread more widely than others. Future projects might explore the complexities of spreadable genres by engaging these issues.

Interruption

My work on representation and spreadable genres helped me to recognize the different layers of interruption occurring through the Uprising of Women in the Arab World's rhetoric. My analysis of interruption in chapter 4 shows how activists' engagement with a specific digital genre can be used to draw public attention to the ways women are marginalized in their everyday lives. As a rhetorical tactic, interruption offers promising opportunities for drawing attention to

discourses by building on existing conditions or discourses. The challenge, for participants, is to understand that an interruptive campaign might just be a starting point. Changing cultural, political, religious, or social practices is a long-term process, and one which might require several interruptions, or a method of keeping participants engaged once the novelty of the interruptive work wears off.

However, interruption might already be more common among activists than the scholarship shows. In chapter 4, I focus on how the Uprising of Women in the Arab World uses a photo campaign to interrupt public and everyday discourses on behalf of women. While I see interruption as a much more central focus for UWAW than for the Pixel Project or Girl Up, I do think that these other campaigns engage in interruption as a portion of their discursive work. For example, the Pixel Project's focus on men, and the genre of the "30 for 30" interview, interrupts the characterization of violence against women as a "women's issue." Likewise, the helpline tweet offers several types of interruption. The individual tweets could interrupt the content of a Twitter feed, as phone numbers and helpline information are most likely not typical topics for tweets. Perhaps more saliently, the tweets' explicit purpose is to interrupt an everyday situation for women experiencing violence. The tweet, or the act of taking up the information in it, offers an interruption to the violent situation. By reminding readers that a person doesn't need to stay in a violent situation, and offering resources for getting out, the helpline tweet attempts to interrupt actual violence against women.

In chapter 2, I quote Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan discussing Girl Up's strategy of changing what girls talk about on social media. She discusses one purpose of the campaign as trying to "redefine our definition of peer-to-peer networking—move it from sharing of movies and music to sharing of missions and movements" ("Queen Rania"). This aspect of the campaign

could certainly be seen as a form of interruption, in terms of inserting new perspectives into an existing conversation. However, both of the examples above raise important questions about interruption as a rhetorical tactic for marginalized groups. Reynolds' discussion of interruption characterizes it as a form of resistance. These two examples—bringing men into the conversation about violence against women and encouraging girls to discuss missions and movements on social media—both interrupt a particular conversation in order to add something that might have been sidelined in that particular context. However, there may be more pressing forms of marginalization occurring in and around this discourse, such as the marginalization of two-thirds-world girls through Girl Up's representational practices.

My focus on interruption in chapter 4 focuses an important way in which marginalized rhetors can use digital rhetoric in order to create an intervention in everyday and public discourses. Once a conversation and practice have been interrupted, however, the next step is to consider what kind of conversation emerges out of that interruption, and whether everyday practices change. While, to a certain extent, some change, however infinitesimal, has occurred through this interruption, the goal of the campaign is clearly to force the discourse and practice in a new direction, and this process will likely take longer to accomplish.

Agency

An unexpected thread that emerged from my examination of each campaign was a focus on agency. The rhetorical work that these campaigns engage participants in might be seen as various ways of offering women opportunities to assert their agency. Involvement with these digital campaigns can occur in a variety of ways. The opportunity to engage through simple, everyday actions might limit engagement for some participants. Perhaps the simple, everyday action is more than some people would have done at all. For others, engaging with activist issues

as a part of everyday activities might be one step in a process of growing or developing an activist identity.

Girl Up encourages young girls to organize and discuss issues that affect many girls in the two-thirds-world. Through discussion of the differences between the lives of girls around the world, Girl Up participants may find ways to compare their situation to that of others and to think critically about the reasons behind these differences and what might be done to effect change. The campaign offers multiple forms of engagement for participants, from following activity on social media, to joining or starting a club, to becoming a teen advisor. The organization's rhetoric of solidarity, however, while perhaps effective in encouraging some girls to relate to the campaign, may limit the agency of girls who feel that Girl Up's rhetoric does not represent their experiences. U.S. girls' agency may also be limited by the ways in which Girl Up's rhetoric glosses over the complexities of girls' different experiences, both in the two-thirds world and the United States.

Participants in the Pixel Project are encouraged to share information about violence against women, in order to increase awareness and work toward ending the problem. Participation might range from spreading a genre, to donating money, to volunteering to serve as a "twitter tag team" member. The multiple possibilities for "taking up" spreadable genres offer a variety of opportunities for individual engagement with the issue and the Pixel Project's publics, and for identifying with the issue of violence against women.

The Uprising of Women in the Arab World encourages participants to share information about women's conditions in Arab regions and to support women's rights. Participants might do this by liking a post, contributing to the photo campaign, engaging in conversation about the

issues presented (online or offline), or attending offline protest events. Through a variety of interruptive tactics, women call attention to sexist practices.

While some of the forms of engagement above may be seen as more “activist” than others, this distinction can be problematic. Each of these campaigns has created low barriers to entry for participants. In order to engage a wide audience, the campaigns offer forms of participation that do not require extensive effort or sacrifice from participants. This should not be taken to mean that digital campaigns never engage participants in a way that involves effort and sacrifice, or that none of the participants in these particular campaigns engage in a way that requires effort and sacrifice. Rather, the minimum required in order for someone to participate is low. Critics of digital activism might argue that a lack of effort or sacrifice means that this is not really activism. However, every activist campaign invites a range of levels of engagement, from organizers who carry a heavy portion of the workload to petition-signers who add their name to a cause. It would be a mistake to privilege offline action because it feels like it takes more sacrifice for participants. If activist engagement is a desirable rhetorical pursuit, then it is important to consider the range of ways activist engagement can occur. Not every type of participation will have the same kind of effect, in quality or degree. Just as engaging writing students through familiar activities such as journaling can be a bridge toward more complicated writing tasks, engaging activists through familiar rhetorical moves might also be a bridge toward richer forms of activist work. The challenge for organizers, then, is to build a structure that enables these multiple forms of participation.

Practical Implications

One important component of work that attempts to connect academic theory to academic practice is a recognition of the practical realities faced by activist projects and their participants.

Simply put, it is easier to critique an activist campaign for its faults than it is to design methods of engaging public participants, rhetorically and otherwise, in work that will accomplish the lofty goals of the campaign. In a sense, “lofty” goals might be more effective in engaging participants (who wants to join a campaign that focuses on thinking more critically about an issue, or making modest strides toward a goal?), but they are more difficult to accomplish. This should not, of course, be a reason to avoid such goals, but rather a motivation to see the rhetorical work of activist campaigns, whether it is the overt focus of the campaign or a path toward other forms of engagement, as a key point of focus for organizers and participants. Just like the rhetorical work of the composition classroom, in which students are asked to think critically about important ideas, compose their own, and revise to achieve their goals, activists’ rhetorical work should be seen as a process, and one that will necessarily involve revision and evolution of ideas and their articulations. With each case study in my dissertation, I noticed important places where organizers’ rhetorical strategies were effective, as well as opportunities for the organization to improve or expand upon their current rhetorical work.

While I focus a great deal on critique in my discussion of Girl Up in chapter 2, there are many positive elements of the campaign. In encouraging girls to form clubs with their peers, Girl Up encourages the kinds of participatory spaces in which girls are able to converse about difficult or unfamiliar ideas and explore their own opinions. Girl Up also uses popular culture in appealing to participants, which is an effective way to engage youth. These strategies seem effective in engaging girls with the campaign. In order to encourage girls to work *with* their peers in developing countries, the campaign might use this knowledge about what works in order to begin working toward more balanced representation in the campaign. Are there aspects of girls’ experience about which girls in different countries can relate? If not, what would it take to build

dialogue across such differences? Perhaps, given the opportunity, the girls might learn to do this simply by talking to one another. The affordances of digital media do not remove all barriers to communication across cultural, geographical, and linguistic differences. However, the video of the Skype call between participants in Girl Up's Leadership Summit and students at the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls offers one example of the ways that an organization like Girl Up can use their resources, along with the affordances of digital media, to begin building such dialogue.

In chapter 3, my exploration of the Pixel Project's spreadable genres examines two different genres that the Pixel Project uses to reach various publics. The genre of the helpline tweet provides information for women in need of direct help with violence. The use of hashtags, direct contact information, and the focus of the agency help to spread information that may help women who are victims of violence. However, most of the tweets are in English (the two exceptions are tweets in Spanish and Haitian Creole). Occasionally, a different genre of tweet includes links to resources in other languages for women experiencing domestic violence. In some cases, these links to information might be helpful, but part of the genre's effectiveness as a spreadable text may be lost. Thus, the Pixel Project could increase the reach of its spreadable genres by including genres in other languages. The second spreadable genre, the "30 for 30" interview, included ways for participants to spread the existing interviews and the ideas generated in those interviews. However, the genre did not enable viewers to respond by creating their own example of the interview genre. While submissions or suggestions were solicited, they were due prior to the month of June. The genre itself offers ways for people to honor their father by giving to the Pixel Project, but not ways to honor their father by adding their own enactment

of the genre. Including a method for readers to participate by creating their own genre might be an effective way of engaging even more participants in this campaign.

For UWAW, the photo campaign offers an important way for participants to identify themselves as members of the campaign and to add their voice to the discussion. The genre is easily created and spread for many participants. However, a drawback of the photo campaign is that the primary material consists of small sound bites, rather than a more complex, nuanced representation of the issues in the region. Comments on photos do include discussions of differences between countries, and dialogue about the issues represented in the photos. However, comments also switch between different languages and are not translated for the rest of the audience. This means that the audience who truly has access to all aspects of UWAW may be much smaller than the audience with an interest in the photos (which come with translated captions). Other discourse of the campaign includes Arabic, English, and some French, but is not consistently translated among these languages. Without access to the full range of discourse, the effectiveness of the campaign may be limited for some participants. A suggestion for UWAW, then, would be to consider who the intended audience of the campaign is and to work toward making sure that audience members have access to the full range of UWAW's discourse.

Areas for Further Research

Of course, the strategies I focus on in this project do not encompass all of the communicative work being done by these campaigns. The limits of looking at a range of work from multiple campaigns comes at the cost of understanding the full rhetorical picture of the organizations. I have also looked at campaigns that are attempting to spread ideas broadly and have a large-scale impact. This is, of course, a strategy with benefits and limitations. In order to

reach a wide audience, and especially given the natural limits on any organization's resources, these organizations have most likely made choices based on broad appeal.

In order to extend the work I begin in this project, future work might consider how ideas discussed in this project – representational practices, spreadable genres, and interruption – work within the entire rhetorical picture of one campaign. Such an analysis would ask what the different parts of the campaign's rhetoric are, and how they work, but also examine them in relation to one another, in order to address the ways that activists can use various genres and strategies to accomplish their goals.

Activist Rhetoric and Reflexivity

As the above discussion shows, each chapter's case study revealed both benefits and limitations among the rhetorical choices of each group of organizers and participants. It would be rare to find an activist organization whose work is all positive or all negative, and it is important to recognize both—this goes back to Angela Davis's words, quoted in the introduction: "Feminism enables us to inhabit contradictions. With it, we can understand what it means to be critical and supportive at the same time" ("Feminism and Activism"). In order for each of these groups to have interested a group of followers and gained momentum, something has to be going right. Yet, at the same time, no activist project is going to be perfect. This is actually a compelling point of overlap between the disciplinary areas I bring into this project. Feminist scholars have pointed to the need for feminist theory and practice to engage in constant processes of critique and reflection. For example, Theresa de Lauretis says that conflict and difference are what make up feminism, and are "never simply differences within feminism . . . they are always the effect of the political and intellectual engagement that feminism has" (25). Iris Marion Young points to the nature of feminist theory and politics as pragmatic, and therefore shifting

with the shifts that occur in social relations and practices (718). Joan Scott talks about feminism's "circulating critical passion" and "refusal to settle down" (18, 21). Allison Weir notes that unity among feminists occurs through practice—through processes of struggle and conflict—and therefore is always in development (120). What fascinates me as a scholar is how well these ideas fit with ideas about rhetoric and about writing (or composing) as a process—the process of negotiating the relationship between different ideas and perspectives, and of revising ideas and words to fit specific goals. It seems to me that feminist theories and activist movements can always engage in revision—of both ideas and rhetorical strategies. Through critique, reflection, and revision, activists can develop nuanced rhetorics with which to engage others and discuss their causes.

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